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# HUMOUR IN THE THEATRE





**H U M O U R**  
**IN THE**  
**T H E A T R E**

**BY**  
**JOHN AYE**

**LONDON**  
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## P R E F A C E

BY IAN HAY

ANECDOTES are the small change of History, but let us not despise them on that account. The threepenny bit is held in no great esteem (outside Scotland), but make a heap of threepenny bits and you have a bank balance.

Similarly, an anthology of personal observations and first-hand experiences in a particular sphere—Parliament, the Theatre, the Services, and the like—judiciously selected and blended, assumes the collective importance of a family archive.

That is why I welcome these volumes, more especially since their ingredients have been drawn from such authentic and readable sources. You may tackle them in two ways: either you may swallow them whole for instruction or peck at them delicately for entertainment; but in either case your reputation as a *raconteur* will be materially increased.



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## NOTE

I HAVE, when known, ascribed my stories to their proper authors; but that they might be collectively acknowledged I here set out my indebtedness both to authors and books as follows: *My Memoirs*, by Sir Frank Benson, *Vagaries of a Vagabond*, by George Gray, *A Sporting and Dramatic Career*, by A. E. T. Watson, *Chestnuts and Small Beer*, by H. J. Jennings, *Mainly about other People*, by Sidney Dark, *Studio and Stage*, by Joseph Harker, Elizabeth Fagan's *From the Wings*, *A Story Teller*, by W. Pett Ridge, H. M. Wallbrook's *A Playgoer's Wanderings*, and E. H. Sothern's *My Remembrances*; *Chestnuts Re-roasted*, by Seymour Hicks, *Cues and Curtain Calls*, by H. Chance Newton, *Jimmy Glover His Book*, *Fifty Years of a Londoner's Life*, by H. J. Hibbert, *Both Sides the Curtain*, by Miss Geneviève Ward, *An Actor's Story*, by Bransby Williams, "Whimsical" Walker's *From Sawdust to Windsor Castle*, Lady Benson's *Mainly Players*, and *On the Stage and*



*Off*, by Jerome K. Jerome, *It's Smee*, by George Shelton, J. H. Barnes's *Forty Years on the Stage*, C. H. Brookfield's *Random Reminiscences*, *Before the Footlights*, by Mrs. Alec Tweedie, *Gleanings On and Off the Stage*, by Lady Bancroft, Ellen Terry's *The Story of My Life*, *A Player under Three Reigns*, by Sir J. Forbes-Robertson, *Dan Leno*, by J. H. Wood, *Twenty Years of Spoof and Bluff*, by Carlton, *Ramblings of an Old Mummer*, by Russell Craufurd, Sidney Paxton's *Stage See-Saws*, J. Jupp's *The Gaiety Stage Door*, and Horace Wyndham's *London Nights*.

JOHN AYE.

LONDON,  
November 1932.

## I

### IN THE OLDEN DAYS

To this age of brilliant theatrical spectacles, crowded houses, and long runs, it is hardly credible that there was a time when the London theatres suffered from the rivalry of such productions as puppet shows. The extent of the injury done to the legitimate drama by such spectacles is suggested by the fact that, during the reign of Charles II, the proprietors of the patent theatres in Drury Lane and near Lincoln's Inn Fields petitioned the King that a puppet show, stationed on the site of what is now Cecil Street, Strand, might not be allowed to exhibit, or, alternatively, be removed to a greater distance, as it was drawing away the people from the theatres and materially reducing their revenues.

This rivalry was not confined to England, for as late as the eighteenth century a Venetian edict ordered that puppet shows were only to be permitted within closed booths, and compelled them to end their performances before

the hour at which the regular theatres opened.

The life of an actor in the Middle Ages was anything but a bed of roses ; by statute, actors were held as "vagrants, rogues, and sturdy beggars," and were liable to such gentle treatment as was prescribed by, "Such players shall be stripped naked from the middle upwards and shall be openly whipped until his or her body be bloody, and shall forthwith be sent from parish to parish where he or she is born for the space of one year." Other gentle punishments, imposed under various statutes, included such persuasive measures as chaining, branding, and burning through the gristle of the ear.

Many actors and persons closely connected with the stage adopted a second, not always nominal calling, in order to avoid these penalties, and to obtain a recognised legal status. Repressive legislation, however, appears only to have been directed against certain portions of the theatrical community ; other and more favoured sections were not only exempt from its tyranny, but also received recognition as part of the household of the great lord or noble to which they attached themselves. When Burbage's company first appeared at the

famous old Globe Theatre, it was known as the Lord Chamberlain's company, and in 1603 James I allowed them to take the title of the King's Servants and they were enrolled in the Royal Household, each man, annually, being allowed four yards of "bastard scarlet" and a quarter of a yard of velvet for a cape.

The Elizabethan public theatre was a very different affair from the ornate building of to-day. It was usually of wood, and the roof was open to the sky, except for a thatched covering to the rear portion of the stage. The tiring (or dressing) rooms were placed either behind the back curtain or at the sides of the stage. There were no seats in the pit, and the pit-tites, or "groundlings," as they were then called, would, if they required such a luxury, bring their stools with them. There was no scenery—only draperies—and no drop curtain, and the stage was strewn with rushes. Patrons of high rank had the privilege of sitting upon the stage during the play, and in private theatres they could rent private rooms or boxes, of which they kept the keys. Costumes and dresses, however, were rich and sumptuous, though there were no actresses to wear them, for all female parts were undertaken by boys,

who were at times sold almost like chattels. The performances usually commenced at three o'clock in the afternoon, immediately after which time a flag was hoisted on the roof of the theatre and trumpets were blown. At quite an early date in theatre history we come across the expression "the green room," the derivation of which term has never satisfactorily been explained. One authority suggests that it originated when the retiring room in the theatre was strewn with green rushes, while another believes it to be a probable corruption of the "agreeing" or "greeing" room, where the actors met and copied or learnt up their parts from the author's script.

Until the time of Charles II, the existence of a theatre was very much dependent upon the whim of those in authority. Thus in 1597, in consequence of a representation made by the Lord Mayor of London, on the ground that the playhouses resorted to by Londoners outside his jurisdiction had become "the rendezvous for all masterless men and vagabond persons that haunt the highways," the Privy Council issued an order to the justices of Middlesex for the suppression of certain playhouses. This announced: "Her Majestie being informed

that there are verie great disorders committed in the common playhouses, both by leud matters that are handled on the stage and by resorte and confluence of bad people, hath given direction that not onlie no plaies shall be used within London or about the city or in any publique place during the tyme of summer, but that also those playhouses that are erected and built onlie for such purposes shal be plucked downe, namlie the Curtayne and the Theatre nere to Shoreditch, or any other within that County."

Even this drastic legislation was surpassed by the Commonwealth Parliament; in a statute of 1647, these dour old Puritans confirmed all players, without exception, to be rogues and vagabonds, and authorised the justices to demolish all seats and galleries. They further ordered that any player discovered in his vocation was to be whipped for the first offence, and for the second to be declared an incorrigible rogue and vagabond, while the poor spectator was to be fined five shillings for every occasion on which he was found to be witnessing any stage play.

The number of riots that at one period occurred in the London theatres provides a some-

what strange feature of theatrical history. The first of the series occurred at Portugal Street Theatre in 1721, and arose through the practice of allowing certain privileged persons to sit on the stage during the performance. One night a certain nobleman, graced with money and position, rather than with sense, crossed the stage from one side to the other that he might speak to a friend. In so doing he passed in front of the actors, and when the manager remonstrated, the nobleman struck him in the face. Immediately the actors' hands were on their swords and they crossed with the beaux who drew in support of the offender. The actors at first routed their enemy, but the beaux, receiving support, returned to the attack, tore up the seats, threw torches among the scenery, and the military had to be called in before order was restored.

In 1737 there was a serious riot at Drury Lane, when a small army of footmen, labouring under some grievance, broke open the doors and attacked the audience and players. In the consequent *mêlée* some thirty people were dangerously wounded.

In the following year, 1738, the Haymarket was the scene of a further disturbance. At this

time throughout the country there was a great wave of anti-French feeling, and, when it was announced that a French company would give a series of representations, it was publicly threatened that the performances, if given, would be stopped. In consequence of this, on the first night a detachment of soldiers was sent to the theatre, while one of the Westminster magistrates took a seat in the house as the representative of law and order, ready, if necessary, to read the Riot Act. The curtain went up, when the unusual sight was seen of files of soldiers with fixed bayonets at the side of the stage. The storm broke. Shrieks and cat-calls drowned every effort of the actors. An attempt at dancing was met with a hailstorm of peas. The pandemonium increased and the crowd would listen to nothing unless the soldiers were withdrawn, and in the end the curtain had to be rung down, leaving victory with the audience.

In 1740 an audience at Drury Lane, disappointed at the non-appearance of a favourite dancer, carefully saw the ladies outside, and then, led by a noble marquis, smashed up the instruments of the orchestra, pulled down the scenery, and generally broke up everything on



which they could lay their hands.

In 1749 the Haymarket was again the scene of a riot, this time arising out of a wager by a well-known duke. It was announced, in compliance with the terms of the wager, that on a certain evening the Great Bottle Conjuror would appear at the theatre and that among other wonderful feats he would summon the spirits of dead relations, and, more incredible as it now seems to us, would also go inside a quart bottle and therein sing a song. In consequence of this announcement the house was crowded. There was, of course, no magician, but a further announcement was made from the stage that the wonder-working man could not come that evening, but would appear the next night, and then, as some compensation to his audience, would go into a pint instead of a quart bottle. Whereupon no less a person than the royal Duke of Cumberland drew his sword and, leaping on the stage, called on the audience to follow him. The reply was instantaneous, and in a very short space of time everything possible had been torn down, smashed up, and carried into the street, where a bonfire was lit.

The next half-century was a period of

quietude in the theatre until 1804, when the attempt of Kemble to raise the prices at Covent Garden resulted in the famous O.P. (i.e. Old Price) Riots. The theatre opened at increased prices on September 18th, and hardly had Kemble started to speak when his voice was drowned by the groans and hisses of his hostile audience. The Riot Act was read from the stage to no effect, and the military were summoned. Night after night for sixty-one nights the management held out and such scenes continued; then Kemble surrendered and the old prices were restored.

In the following year the Haymarket was again the scene of what is perhaps the most peculiar theatrical riot on record. Dowton, at that time manager, had announced the revival of a piece entitled, *The Tailors: a Tragedy for Warm Weather*. This production was a satire upon the sartorial craft, and in consequence an indignation meeting was held amongst the fraternity, with the resultant threat that seventeen thousand tailors would attend and hiss the piece. The threat was laughed at, but on the opening night it was found that the craft had secured nearly every seat in the house. The curtain went up. The piece began, but

not a word could be heard in consequence of the uproar, while outside thousands more tailors tried to storm the house. The special constables brought on the scene were helpless, and only the arrival of a troop of Life Guards was effective in restoring order.

At one time, during the early part of the Victorian era, many theatres found it necessary to introduce what was known as "the order system," under which complimentary tickets were given broadcast. When, however, the recipients of these arrived at the theatre, they would be told in some cases that there was no room in the pit, but that, if they wished, they could go into the dress circle on payment of a shilling. Further, programmes were discovered to cost sixpence, cloakroom accommodation cost another sixpence, drinks were overpriced, and gratuities were expected at every turn. Often, indeed, the visitor's hat or umbrella was nearly torn from him by the attendants, and if he refused to avail himself of their services, he met with scant courtesy. "Thank you," said one bold man to a lady attendant at one of these theatres, "I prefer to keep my hat, and I have neither coat nor umbrella." "Then you ought to be damned

well ashamed of yourself! " retorted the lady.

Advertising methods of this period would fill the manager of to-day with horror. When Kean came back from his American tour in 1822, his return to Drury Lane took the form of a street procession, the great actor being drawn to the theatre in a coach by four negroes, while a cavalcade of horsemen composed of bruisers, jockeys, prize-fighters, and publicans escorted the coach. It was almost fifty years after this that George Leybourne, the famous "Champagne Charlie," who, starting life as a bricklayer, came to earn the highest salary that the halls had until then paid, secured publicity by driving to the halls in a carriage drawn by four ponies with two outriders dressed as jockeys. Whereupon his rival, Laburnum, appeared behind four mules with outriders rigged in the regulation uniform—scarlet jackets and sealskin caps—of the street shoeblack.

Of the quality of plays and the standards of acting at the minor theatres of the time, perhaps the less said the better. Sir Frank Benson tells how, in his early days, certain actors never studied any parts but their own, and that only from mysterious bits of paper called

"scrip." The sight of a book was anathema to them. "Text, text? I've never heard of it," they would say. "What the hell is text? All I want, laddie, is first the bizness, then the cues, and I bet my last bob I get a bread-and-butter notice."

The type of play in which these actors appeared must have been something like the one described by George Gray. "One scene represented a prison yard with a door to the condemned cell and three other doors which appeared to lead to the warders' quarters. A bell tolled to denote that the fatal hour had approached. On came a warder with a bunch of keys. He opened the cell door, the condemned man entered. The bell tolled again as the warder said, 'It is time.' The convict then made a long speech as to his innocence and the misery of his dear wife and chee-ild. Again the bell tolled, while the warder in churchyard tones announced, 'It is time.' Both the other doors opened and two more warders appeared with a lot of keys as the bell continued its accompaniment. The convict, turning to the warders, murmured, 'Before I go to my doom I would like to sing of the old home'; whereupon they all sang several glees, after which

I left."


Some theatres, until almost recent times, were little else than licensed bear-gardens. Sir Frank Benson describes the Oxford theatre of 1883. "Hitherto it had been run on the theory that the performers were the last people who required any attention or who were to be considered as responsible for the entertainment. The play was only of secondary importance. The real excitement was that the pit had to take umbrellas to shield themselves from being pelted and spat on by the gods in the gallery. The umbrella was not only a shield, but a weapon of offence when the pit rushed upstairs to retaliate. The front row of the stalls spent most of its time in destroying the instruments of the orchestra or putting them hopelessly out of tune. The dress circle would rush on the stage via the boxes, dance with those prima donnas who were pretty, engage in pugilistic encounters with the officials and actors, or attempt to give impromptu performances of their own until driven back to their places by volleys of stones, sticks, bricks, eggs, oranges, teacups, and potatoes from pit and gallery. The only calm moment was when all the undergraduate sections of the house united

in a *sauve qui peut* from a raid by the proctors and their bulldogs. Then windows, doors, rainpipes, roof, and stage ventilators were quickly broken in a rapid and undignified flight."

At this, and earlier periods, the Censor of plays does not appear to have been remarkably active. The original appointment of this official is due to Horace Walpole. For some time there had been an agitation for the creation of such a post, but in spite of the pressure brought to bear by the privileged lessees of the patent theatres anxious to secure a stranglehold on the activities of their rivals, the authorities seemed reluctant to move in the matter. But when Fielding was about to produce *The Golden Rump*, a nonsensical thing full of political abuse and blasphemy, a copy was somehow secured and was brought to the notice of Walpole, the Prime Minister, who, shocked at the sentiments it contained, brought it down to the House and read out some of the more flagrant passages, with the result that an Act was at once passed demanding that all dramatic pieces should be inspected and approved by the Lord Chamberlain.

Agitation, public sentiment, and managerial

conscience have, in recent times, been responsible for the increased salaries paid to humbler members of the profession. The pioneer in this respect was Kean, who raised the ballet girls at his theatre from one shilling a night (out of which they had to find shoes and stockings), to a guinea a week with everything in the way of clothing found for them. But even in recent years, public support of idealism in the theatre has meant that payment in often good companies has been meagre in the extreme. Thus at the time when Frank Benson formed his Benson Company out of the old Bentley Company, his salary, and that of most of the others, was only thirty shillings a week. The leading man got three pounds, the stage manager and his daughter, who played leading parts, got seven between them, and some members drew as little as twenty-eight shillings. The total weekly salary list did not exceed thirty pounds.





## II

### CRITICISM

THE British Press generally errs on the side of kindness both to plays and performers, at the worst damning with faint praise; inevitably, however, there are occasions when wretched acting in a poorer play than usual sours even the natural kindness of the critic, and he retaliates for his ill-spent evening in no uncertain terms. Some years ago, the *Sun*, an extremely outspoken paper, gave what is perhaps the shortest notice on record. The play, produced by Penley, was entitled *Mr. Symkin*, and the *Sun's* criticism was: "Globe Theatre. *Mr. Symkin*. Good God. What piffle." Almost equally brief, though perhaps a little milder, was Mr. H. J. Jennings on a play produced at a Bristol theatre. "Last night a play called *Pure as Snow* was produced at the Broad Street Theatre. It was not as pure as snow."

A clever notice that appeared a few years ago in an American paper dealt with a per-

formance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; it reported that "last evening the —— Company gave *Uncle Tom's Cabin* at the Assembly Rooms. There were fifty in the caste and ten real bloodhounds. The dogs gave an excellent performance, but received little support from the rest of the company."

At the conclusion of the play, on a not very successful first night, the theatre manager came out to have a word or two with a well-known newspaper dramatic critic. "Well, what do you think of the play?" he asked. "I have one small criticism to make," was the reply, "and that is, that in the last act it would be better for that fellow to shoot himself instead of taking poison." "Indeed, why?" "Well, for one thing, it would wake up everyone."

Dramatic criticism in some parts of the Continent appears to be run on very different lines from what it is in England. Mr. A. E. T. Watson is responsible for the description of the first stage-appearance of Signor Campobello (otherwise Harry Campbell), who later appeared with great success at Covent Garden. This took place in Italy, and on the morning of the day that he was to make his *début* he received

a visit from an individual who announced himself as the dramatic critic of one of the local papers. He wished Campbell to hear the notice he had already written—apparently from inspiration. This was to the effect that “so gifted a genius, the possessor, moreover, of so superb a voice, had not been heard for incalculable years, and his rendering of the character was something after the nature of a revelation.” After this, however, came the other side of the picture, for the critic then produced a notice in which the singer was described as having no voice, as being ignorant of the elements of his profession, and, in fact, suggesting that he was a blot on the landscape. It was then further explained by the critic that the first notice would cost £25, and if this was not paid the second would go into the paper. Campbell finally compromised by giving the critic a new suit of clothes and a few pounds, and in its next issue the paper hailed him as a brilliant success.

The palm for the worst testimonial is probably held by no less a person than Charles B. Cochran, who, while playing in America in his early days, received the following bouquet from a Pennsylvania paper. “Charles B. Cochran

played the part of Smart, the detective. He certainly must have learnt the art of acting in a stable with hungry horses; he did nothing but attempt to chew the paint from the scenery. A more ridiculous chump has never been seen on the local stage."

Running this close, but a little more elegantly expressed, was a criticism by John Oxenford, one-time dramatic critic of *The Times*, who thus delivered himself in writing of a certain actor appearing at the Haymarket: "We learn from a contemporary that this gentleman is considered a very promising actor. For our own part we don't care how much he promises, so long as he doesn't perform."

It was the practice at one time for music-hall turns to assume names already familiar to the public, usually by way of advertisements. This custom once provided a satirical critic with an excellent opportunity, which he seized in commenting on the performance of two gentlemen who had followed this practice: "The next item on the programme," he wrote, "was a double turn described as 'Guinness and Perkins, the Brewers of Fun.' Unfortunately, on the night of our visit, the gentlemen were not

brewing."

The great ones of the stage have not always escaped adverse criticism of the severest kind. Irving, in his early days, was once most unmercifully treated; among other things he was described as "looking and acting like a very seedy and reduced ringmaster of a very unprosperous circus." Another actor, who, uncharacteristically, bore the reputation of being very conceited, was dealt with by John Oxenford, who wrote in *The Times*: "As for Mr. X., he is so much favoured by nature that he scorns to be indebted to art." And in the same vein was the American criticism of an English actor: "He played the King as if his partner had just played the ace."

A scathing criticism was that written by John Forster on Edwin Forrest's performance of *Macbeth*. "Our old friend Mr. Forrest," he said, "afforded great amusement to the public by his performance of *Macbeth* on Friday evening at the Princess's. Indeed, our best comic actors do not often excite so great a quantity of mirth. The change from an inaudible murmur to a thunder of sound was enormous, but the grand feature was the combat, in which he stood scraping his sword

against that of Macduff. We were at a loss to know what this gesture meant till an enlightened critic in the gallery shouted out, 'That's right, sharpen it.' "

The minor characters in a play usually receive little or no recognition, but Clement Scott, on one occasion, managed to bring into the limelight a performer of whom, fortunately, little is usually heard. His conclusion to a not too favourable notice read: "And the prompter, although seen at rare intervals, soon became a favourite with the audience."

The dramatic critic is like the clergyman—he stands in a favoured position, and however hard he may hit, the recipient of his blows is, for the most part, unable to strike back. The celebrated actor Barrymore, however, once gave as good as he got. He had been introduced to a critic who had consistently and constantly slated him, and, after the introduction had taken place, looked hard at the aggressor. "You've written some very insulting things about me," he said, "but now that I see you, my anger is turned to sympathy." "Oh," said the other, "then you read my criticisms?" "I am compelled to," replied Barrymore quietly. "You see, I am a late riser, and by

the time I get to the newsagents', yours is the only paper they have left."

Mr. H. J. Jennings tells an apposite story of an actor who, by protesting against a newspaper criticism, brought on himself a flood of ridicule. The play was *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Mr. Arthur Wood took the part of Bottom. Mr. Wood was a very clever actor, but a little over-sensitive to criticism, and when a local paper suggested certain modifications in his playing of the part, he wrote a very indignant letter to the editor. This was duly published by the paper with the sly comment, "Mr. Wood seems rather thin-skinned about his Bottom."

But, generally speaking, the harshest newspaper criticism of plays and actors is mild compared with that of rival dramatists and fellow actors. It was Oscar Wilde who said of one piece that "it was the best play he had ever slept through"; and what could have been more crushing than the reply made to a dramatist who was grumbling at the small houses drawn by his play: "I suppose," said the dramatist finally, "it's owing to the war." "No," was the confident reply; "it's owing to the piece."

Irving, although usually the gentlest of men, had little use for mediocrity, and when he came across it on the stage his comments gained in brevity what they lacked in mercy. As a producer he was almost a tyrant, insisting on perfection in every word, action, and gesture. He once was conducting a rehearsal where one actor had, in his own opinion but not in Irving's, given a good rendering of the part. When finished, he looked in the great actor's direction to elicit if possible some expression of his pleasure, and got, "Very good, my boy; now let me see you act it."

Irving used to delight in telling a story of his early days in which he was very much the criticised party. One night when playing *Hamlet*, he noticed an old lady in the front row of the pit dissolved in tears, and, delighted at this apparent appreciation of his acting, he sent round word that he would like to see her after the performance. When she arrived, Irving said, "Madam, I perceived that my acting moved you very much." "Indeed it did," said the old lady. "You see, I've a young son myself play-acting somewhere up in the north, and it broke me up to think that he might be no better at it than you."



Macready was another great actor whose insistence on perfection in every detail was most marked. He had, however, an unfortunate habit of sometimes uttering his criticisms more or less under his breath, not only during the progress of the play but even at the end of his lines, and when he forgot to drop his voice the result was oftentimes ludicrous. One day he was on the stage with another actor who was playing the part of a beau, but who laboured under the disadvantage of being very slovenly in appearance. Looking at him, the great tragedian began, in the words of the book, "See where the young prince comes, a very noble youth of handsome face and gallant bearing," and then added, "But, God forgive me, look at his dirty neck!"

The quality of criticism from fellow actors is instanced in the Seymour Hicks story of how, when he was rehearsing Richard III, he one day met Claude Carlton, who said to him, "I hear you are going to play Richard." "I am," replied Seymour. "Ah, well," said the witty Carlton, "you'll be saved a good deal of trouble in the make-up. You won't have to wear a hump." "Why not?" was the astonished query. "Because," came the crushing reply,

"the audience will have that."

Sidney Dark records another instance where Seymour Hicks drew savage criticism, and this at the hands of Irving. "You remind me," said the great actor once, "of my old friend Charles Mathews." Seymour was, of course, delighted, and hastened to thank Irving for the compliment. "Yes, my boy," repeated Irving, "it is of my old friend Mathews that you remind me." Then came a pause, and presently a murmur, "You wear just the same collars."

Another Irving story of a successful hit at a brother actor belongs to a time when he was putting on one of his Shakespearian pageants, in which it was necessary that he should be mounted. A horse was accordingly obtained from a firm who specialised in providing animals for stage purposes, and Irving, who was not much of a horseman, anxiously enquired if it was quiet. "It's as quiet as a lamb," was the reassuring answer; "it's only just finished an engagement at His Majesty's Theatre carrying Mr. Beerbohm Tree in *Richard II.*" At this moment the horse yawned. "Ah!" said Irving, "he's a bit of a critic too, I see."

Irving, in turn, however, provoked as good as this from W. S. Gilbert. A lady had asked the latter if he had seen Irving in *Faust* at the Lyceum. "No, madam," was the reply, "I only go to the pantomime at Christmas."

It is to be expected that the professional is not always too gentle in his remarks on the efforts of the amateur. It is said of W. S. Gilbert—and I wonder how some of the Gilbert and Sullivan Societies feel about it—that his pet aversion was amateur actors. Once he witnessed one of his plays performed by a club of what Seymour Hicks calls "those brave individuals who always step in where audiences fear to tread," and was asked by an interested party what he thought of the Club. "Oh!" replied Gilbert, "I think it's not so much a club as a bundle of sticks."

One aspiring amateur carried confidence to the length of giving what he considered to be an excellent imitation of a well-known actor, with the said actor actually present at the performance. Later, he obtained an introduction to the celebrated man and asked for a verdict on his performance. "Well," came the crushing reply, "one of us is rotten."

When the opinions held by the writer, the producer, and the actor as to who makes the success of the piece are so diverse, a good deal of acid criticism finds vent. Mr. Joseph Har-ker tells of being present at a rehearsal conducted by Irving. Enraged at one actor, whose delivery as regards audibility left much to be desired, Irving at length turned on him with, "Please remember, Mr. X, that you are not playing Little Bo-Peep."

The tables were, however, turned where the author conducting the rehearsal was continually pulling up one of the actors who, in his opinion, was overdoing his part. No improvement took place, and the author at length suggested that the piece was not a melodrama, and that the player for once should try to speak as if he were in a drawing-room. "Pardon me," came the reply, "but I shouldn't think of saying such damn silly things in a scullery, let alone a drawing-room!"

A score to the authors is made in the story of W. S. Gilbert who was asked some question about a leading lady with whom he was very disappointed. The provoked reply was that he only had a misleading lady.

Criticism comes from below as well as above,

and criticisms from some of the lower ranks of the theatrical profession have their own pungency and incisiveness. Elizabeth Fagan tells a story of a company to which she belonged opening a week at Eastbourne with *The Merchant of Venice*. On the first night, when all the ladies of the company were dressing, a dresser attached to the theatre came in and asked, "Which of you ladies may be Venus?" "Venus?" said one of the astonished party, "What do you mean?" "Of course I mean Venus," said the dresser; "you're playing the *Merchant of Venus*, ain't you?" It was then explained to her that the word over which she had so sadly stumbled was Venice, not Venus. "Oh!" she said in a tone full of disappointment, "now I call that a pity. We 'ad a Venus here a week or two ago. She sat all night in a cockle-shell. It took lovely."

In his early days Jimmy Godden, the popular comedian, secured a doubtful compliment from a stage hand. He was appearing at Wigan, and for some days failed to get home with his humour, hardly managing to raise a laugh. Towards the end of the week, however, he noticed one woman who giggled right throughout his turn, and on coming off he re-

marked on the fact to one of the stage hands. "Oh, that woman," said the hand in a tone of deepest contempt: "we calls her the laughing jackass. She'll laugh at anything. But, man, that's nowt to what she'll do when there's owt funny on."

Criticism by the audience ranges over the whole field, varying from the mild to the grossly abusive. Of the first variety is the story of the author who, sitting in the stalls on a first night, was asked by his neighbour, "Can you tell me what they are putting on here to-morrow night?" And this of the friend who, being asked by an actor, "Have you ever seen me act?" replied, "No, and I've paid often." A similarly friendly critic, making his own opportunity, once asked a self-satisfied actor what was the name of the play in which he had just seen him acting, and receiving the reply, *The Stage Coach*, brutally remarked, "Then when you play next, may I be an outside passenger!"

A young couple went to see a drama, and took their baby with them; the little one soon began to make its presence known, and the acting manager was very quickly on the scene with the information that if they could not

keep the baby quiet he should be obliged to refund the parents' money and ask them to leave the theatre. Fortunately, at this point the baby took it into its head to go to sleep. The play went on and proved to be far from attractive, and after a while the husband turned to the wife and said, "You might just give the kid a pinch, will you?"

Pett Ridge tells of an occasion when a company were giving *King Lear*. Hardly had the scene between the King and his daughter Goneril been concluded than one lady turned to another and exclaimed in a voice that could be heard all over the theatre, "Rather an unpleasant family, these Lears."

A variety troupe who had once appeared before the Prince of Wales were very insistent that this should always be announced on the bills. Once, at a show in a Lancashire town, one of the troupe was giving a clog dance when there came a voice from the gallery, "Waal, if yon's bin afore t' Prince o' Wales, oor Jack 'as no richt to be in t' factory."

Seated behind the author on a first night, a lady admirer of things theatrical quietly snipped off a lock of his hair. Unfortunately, the play turned out to be a dismal failure,

whereupon the lady tapped the author on the shoulder and handed back the stolen lock with suitable apologies.

About midway between the two extremes is the story of the gentleman who presented himself one night at the box office of a theatre where the play was running none too well and demanded a seat. He had obviously taken "one over the eight," and the box-office attendant refused to pass him into the house. He became very indignant at the decision. "Why won't you sell me a seat?" he demanded. "Frankly, because you're not sober," said the attendant. "Do you think I'm drunk, then?" was the next question. "Yes," said the attendant. The look of indignation was at once replaced by one of pain. "Why, of course I'm drunk," said the applicant. "Do you think I should come into your rotten theatre if I was sober?"

When a little fit-up company was presenting a somewhat lurid drama, one man in the audience was noticed to be weeping bitterly. Thinking he had been moved to such emotion by the play, his next-door neighbour turned to him and said, "Why are you crying? The hero hasn't really been killed." "I know,"



said the melancholy one; "that's why I'm so upset."

But there are times in the theatre world when criticism takes a concrete rather than an abstract form. Two actors who had met after a long interval were exchanging notes. "Yes," said the first, "I've left the stage." "What made you do that?" asked the other. "Well, I had a hint that I was not suited for an actor." "I see," said his friend; "some little birds whispered it, I suppose." "No," said the one-time actor sadly; "but they might have become little birds if they had been allowed to hatch."

As a method of conveying a 'decided opinion, nothing could be more definite than that described as being the practice in Harwood's Variety Theatre. The clientele of this establishment always provided themselves with refreshments, oranges and nuts being most in evidence, and to express disappointment or disapproval they threw the peel or the shells on the stage. When the play or turn was particularly bad empty bottles were sometimes used, and this kind of missile was of such frequent occurrence that the band was protected by a strong wire netting.

There is in every audience some one or more persons of whom it is impossible to say whether or not they are enjoying the performance. Mr. H. M. Wallbrook was once sitting in the pit of the Court Theatre at a performance of *Man and Superman* and had for next-door neighbour an enigmatical person of a few words. In the course of their short acquaintance this individual made only three remarks, one at the close of each act. At the end of the first act he said, "Well, that's a corker!" After the second he exclaimed, "Well, that's a knock-out!" and at the end of the third he muttered, "Well, I'm damned!" and putting on his hat walked out of the theatre.

Most of the best stories of theatrical criticism are in disparagement of either actors or play, or both; but approval also has its humour. There is, for example, the story of the Yorkshireman who was asked by a friend, "Hast been to t'theatre?" "Aye," was the reply, "I hav' an' all; it was a gradely play—*East Lynne*. I took t'missis and kids." "Didst enjoy theesel?" "We did an' all," replied the theatre-goer with decision; "we cried all t' b—— night."

During the run of *Dracula* at the Duke of

York's Theatre, one member of the audience sat through the first act, frozen to the marrow with horror, but pulled himself together at the end and with faltering steps staggered to the bar. He arrived there, and still under the influence of the play, turned an ashen face upon the barmaid and in a voice that might have come out of a vampire-haunted tomb, demanded, "One large blood and soda, please, miss."

How appreciation may sometimes be earned in error is shown by a story told of Wilson Barrett. He once played in Dublin, shortly after a political murder for which a "patriot" had been hanged, and was greeted all the time he was on the stage with a perfect hurricane of cheers. As he came off he remarked to the property man that the audience seemed to like his acting. "It isn't your acting at all," said the man, "it's your name. Just that and sorra a bit else. Shure, the poor fellow that was hanged last week was a Barrett, and they're after taking you—God help thim—for a relation."

Audiences are not usually backward in showing their appreciation when it has been well and duly earned, but, by what would seem

almost an act of retributive justice, Sothern, a most notorious practical joker, was once nearly robbed of his due by means of a practical joke. The story, as told by his son, is that he was once induced by an old friend to go down into the country and give a matinée performance of *Lord Dundreary*. This friend was a great joker, and before the performance he made it his business to warn all those attending that they must be very careful in their behaviour. "This is no cheap kind of play," he said, "and you must not let the great London actor think that we are wanting in manners. Don't applaud, don't laugh, it isn't done; people of taste and fashion don't do it now. Laugh when you get home, but remember the loud laugh denotes the vacant mind. If you like the acting you can tell him so at the reception after the play." When the eventful evening came, there was not a laugh or a token of applause to be heard. Sothern was distracted at such a reception and at last, unable to stand it any longer, he advanced to the front of the stage and, addressing the audience, said, "Ladies and gentlemen, if you don't laugh, I can't go on." At once the laughter broke out and the play proceeded merrily.

When one thinks of the actor and actress on the stage with rows and rows of faces in front of them, only too often showing no sense of either pleasure or pain, one is inclined to wonder how a criticism of the audience by the actors would appear. Perhaps in this connection the following lights up the speculation. An actress, taking a morning stroll, passed a fishmonger's shop and her eye was suddenly caught by the serried ranks of cod-fish, which seemed to stare at her with their glassy eyes. "Good heavens!" she exclaimed as she hurried away, "that reminds me that I have a *matinée* to-day."

There have been occasions, however, when, dangerous as the practice is, criticism has come from the stage itself. A company once toured with a play in which Napoleon was the leading character, and one of the lines of the play was, "Sire, it has been decided that you are to be banished to St. Helena." When the company reached Wigan, business was very bad, and one night, to make matters worse, the actor who took the part of Napoleon had drunk not wisely but too well. Things, however, proceeded fairly satisfactorily until it came to the words, "Sire, it has been decided that you are

to be banished to St. Helena," at which point Napoleon lurched to the front of the stage and, glaring at the audience, said, "Well, thank heaven it isn't Wigan!"

"Yes," said an actor-manager, "our plays were too high-brow for our audiences. At one town they hissed us like blazes." "What did you do?" enquired a listener. "Oh," said the other, "I called the entire company on the stage and we out-hissed the blighters."

No mention of dramatic criticism would seem complete that did not make some mention of George Bernard Shaw, and quote examples of the biting Shavian wit. G. B. S. was once asked by Augustus Harris what he thought of his orchestra. "Don't you think it's splendid?" he queried. "Yes," was the reply, "they're not bad—not bad—but I think they've wonderfully deteriorated since I heard them last on the Sunday boat to Hampton Court."

When *Arms and the Man* was first produced, there was an overwhelming call for the author, broken only by one "boo" from the gallery. "Yes, sir," said Shaw, looking in the direction of the voice, "I quite agree with you, but what can we two do against a houseful?"

A young dramatist insisted on reading his play to G. B. S., and soon the latter fell fast asleep. The young man was stung to the quick and woke his victim to point out that he was reading his play in order to obtain a comment on it. "My dear lad," said Shaw, "you asked me for a comment on your play. Sleep is a comment."

### III

## PROPRIETORS, MANAGERS, AND ACTOR-MANAGERS

THE proprietors and managers of theatres and music-halls have not always in the past been conspicuous, at any rate among the smaller fry, for either education or social polish. More often than not they started life in some entirely different capacity—very often that of publican—and the new rôle in which they found themselves did not always sit well upon them. A typical example was the manager who had two very defined foibles—one his habit under all circumstances of carrying an umbrella, and the other a great objection to anyone cracking nuts in his theatre. During a performance of *Othello*, while making his round of the theatre, he noticed one man who had started this objectionable practice. The irate proprietor approached him from behind, hooked him in the back of his collar with his umbrella handle, and dragged him out of the auditorium with the startling comment, "Come out of this, you



blank blank squirrel. Do you think you're in church? "

Another member of this school was one of whom Seymour Hicks tells us that being disappointed with the work of his company he called a rehearsal, and then addressed its members as follows: "Look 'ere. No wonder we ain't doing well. The actin' ain't up to the mark. For instance, you, me lad (picking out the leading man of the company), you're slovenly in your dialogue. This is a society dramer. You are playing an Earl, and when you turn to the Countess you say, 'What are you a-doing?' when you ought to know perfectly well the line should be, 'What are you a-doing of?'"

Our best stories of managers, perhaps, come out of the world of the lesser music-halls. Prominent among these notabilities was the proprietor of a provincial hall whose custom it was to address his audience every Saturday night, extolling the programme to which they had listened or were about to listen. On one Saturday, however, after he had given the usual harangue, he came to the conclusion that he had been a little too laudatory, and that it might have the effect of making the artists

think too much of themselves and consequently demand a higher salary. He accordingly added to his speech the following codicil: "But I've a crowd coming on Monday, ladies and gentlemen, that can wipe the floor with this lot."

Marie Lloyd, in her early days, was employed at a small music-hall in Hackney, where the manager was more than a bit of a character. It was his practice during the performance to walk up and down the middle gangway for the purpose of keeping the house in order, and during this turn of sentry-go he would at times address the house generally in a friendly manner by pointing his thumb over his shoulder at some turn on the stage and saying, "What do you think of that for thirty bob?"—the figure mentioned being the amount of the artist's weekly salary.

Another proprietor of the same variety owned a small variety hall of the working of which he knew little or nothing. So long as the returns were satisfactory, he took little interest in the place; but if they began to fall, he was at once on the spot, wanting to know the reason why. Now, as a general rule, the last turn at a music-hall, usually one of the weakest, is known as "a chaser," and it so hap-

pened that, on one of his visits to the hall, the proprietor came in while this last turn was being given and many of the audience were filing out. He at once asked how much the turn was paid, and on being told said the return was poor. "But," protested the acting manager, "he's only a chaser—last turn, you know." "'E's last turn, is 'e?" said the proprietor. "Well, 'e's no blinkin' good, and, in future, let me tell yer, we won't have no more last turns."

It would, however, be difficult to beat the business enterprise of one manager about whom Mr. Joseph Harker, the well-known scene painter, tells the following story. Mr. Harker joined the company as a minor actor, and one of his many duties was to stick bills. At one place in the south of Ireland the manager declared that the bill-sticker had not done his job properly, as he had failed to take advantage of one of the finest advertising sites in the district. To prove this he seized the paste-can, brush, and a bundle of posters, and, ordering Harker to follow him, walked off to show him where he lacked enterprise. The walk ended in the churchyard, where the manager at once proceeded to plaster the more con-

spicuous gravestones with notices of the forthcoming play.

The standard of education among theatre managers and proprietors of the lesser houses was not confined to them. As late as the 'seventies the old Strand Theatre was managed by a dear old lady whose malapropisms were celebrated throughout the theatre world. She informed the company on one occasion that it was her intention to have a new spinal staircase put up to the flies. But her best effort occurred when she was once congratulated on a pretty carpet that she had introduced into the theatre. "I'm so glad you like it," she said; "the Prince of Wales expectorated on that carpet when he was here the other night."

Another one-time theatrical magnate, who in his earlier days had been a pawnbroker, was John B. Stetson of the Globe Theatre, Boston, U.S.A. One day, while watching the rehearsal of a passion play, he turned to the stage manager and enquired, "Who are them fellows on the stage now?" "Those," replied the manager, "are the twelve apostles." "The devil they are," said J. B. vigorously. "What's the good of twelve on a stage this size? Have fifty."

The manager who preceded Wyndham in the management of the Criterion Theatre was a rare hand at a bloomer. His efforts in this direction were a perennial source of joy to his various companies. One day he enquired of his stage manager regarding the progress of a young lady who had recently joined the cast and whom he had not seen. The stage manager was delighted with her progress and replied, "Well, I think that she is a perfect *ingénue*." "Oh, is she?" said the proprietor. "Then the best thing for you to do, me lad, is to call a rehearsal and tell her about it."

To the defect of a limited education there was often added a memory that was none too good. One theatrical proprietor of this description was the possessor of some very choice port, and it was his custom to press a glass of this on any theatrical celebrity who called on him. Once he was visited by Irving, and the latter having sampled the port, and being asked for his opinion, replied that it was "Nectar for the gods." The next caller, however, was not quite so flattering or so enthusiastic, and, in reply to the usual query, answered casually, "Quite good." "Quite good," said the indignant proprietor. "Why, when Mr. Irving was here the

other day, he said it was a necktie for the Almighty."

It was the manager of the Sydney Theatre who, whilst rehearsing a new play, heard someone standing near him criticise a portion of the scenery in remarking that the perspective was wrong. Indignant at such an assertion, he at once sent for the scene painter and, on the latter's arrival, burst out with, "I didn't limit you to expense in any way, so why the devil didn't you get the right perspective? Look sharp, my lad, and get another at once."

Often the moral standard would be no better than his educational one. Jimmy Glover used to tell a story of one of that ilk who toured with "spouses who had not always been provided with marriage certificates." Arrived at one town, he drove up to his former lodgings, and, handing out his "Missis," introduced her to his landlady with, "Ah, Mrs. Brown, here we are again; you know the wife, don't you? My dear, of course you remember Mrs. Brown." By this time the landlady had had time to take stock of her guests. "How the lady has changed," she remarked. "What's that?" snapped the manager. "I was only saying how she's changed. Why, she's not the same

woman." "No, she's not," came the decisive reply; "get us some dinner."

There is, of course, to be found as great a difference amongst the ranks of theatre and music-hall managers as between the captain of an ocean liner and the skipper of a Grand Junction Canal barge, and, to a certain extent, the same applies to their audiences. The principal character of a story told by Mr. H. Chance Newton was a Mr. Harry Hart, who at one time ran the Star at Bermondsey. He was one day chatting with Henry Irving when the latter asked him if he was doing good business. Harry's reply was to the effect that it was bad business. On this Irving remarked that the Lyceum was also suffering depression. "You see, my dear fellow," he explained, "so many of my patrons are just now going to the Opera." "Yes, guv'nor," replied Harry, "and my blinkin' paterons has all gone 'opping."

A theatre of the same description with at one time a more than local reputation was the Garrick, Whitechapel, and its proprietor, a man named Richards, was quite well known in professional circles. Strolling one day in the City, he ran across the proprietor of the Covent Garden Theatre, who had just publicly an-

nounced that he proposed to open his Italian Opera season a month earlier than usual. "Here," said Richards, "what d'ye mean by opening your show so much earlier? You've cut right into my season." "Your season?" said the other in astonishment. "How the dickens can the Italian Opera season affect your miserable gaff? Your patrons aren't likely to come to my theatre." "No," replied Richards, "but they'll be outside picking pockets."

The theatrical manager is usually the most urbane of men, but it does sometimes happen that a succession of bad houses will have the effect of developing an unexpected side of his character, and the audience for once will get his frank opinion of their neglect to appreciate the good fare provided. A fit-up manager who had experienced a very bad season, when the last night in a certain town arrived, made a farewell speech: "I have to thank you one and all," he began, addressing the meagre audience, "for the noble way in which you have rallied to this—er—Temple of Thespis. I thank you for the kind manner in which you have patronised our efforts." After this there was rather a long pause, and then in a flood came



what he really thought: "But, God help me, if I had opened a season on the Goodwin Sands, I should have had more support from the shipwrecked sailors."

One of the general troubles of a manager's life is the staving-off of those persons who wish to visit his theatre without the disagreeable necessity of paying for their seats. The methods adopted to obtain these free passes often deserve, but do not always get, success for their amazing impudence. A young lady who had sent a manager a buttonhole followed it up next day with a request for a seat in the stalls. The reply she received ran as follows: "Dear Madam, I regret to say that all the seats in the theatre are firmly fastened down, and, in addition to this, the proprietor has the greatest objection to any being given away as souvenirs."

Mr. H. J. Hibbert tells a story which for colossal cheek it would be difficult to beat. One evening a gentleman in evening dress, and accompanied by a lady, handed in a card at the box office saying that he understood that it would procure him two seats. "I'm afraid you've been fooled," said the manager, who had come on the scene; "I don't even know

the gentleman." "But," expostulated the applicant, "I've brought this lady out and I—well, it isn't convenient for me to pay." "Sorry, but I can't help you," said the manager. "Well," replied the unabashed one, "you look a sportsman. Won't you give me your card to some other johnnie?"

The actor-manager is not an unmixed blessing, especially when his own opinion of his acting is greater than that held either by his company or the audience. It is not a subject on which he can be wisely approached by other members of the cast, but in one case the intimation was conveyed sufficiently if not directly. The particular manager, whose opinions of his own powers as an actor were not shared by his company, had a little boy about five years of age, and it was the practice for the little chap to say his prayers to his father each night before being put to bed. Knowing this, two members of the company gave the tiny fellow a little extra instruction, with the result that on the following night he concluded his petitions as follows: "And please, God, make father a better actor."

But, even if a good actor, the actor-manager is not always a good business man; when such

is the case the life of his business manager is not a bed of roses. Tree was well known for his generosity, and during the time he was at the Haymarket his manager had constantly to be reminding him of the necessity for economy. In pursuance of this he once suggested that it was not really necessary for him to be taken to lunch at the Carlton every day and the bill paid out of petty cash. Tree thanked him very warmly and promised amendment, and when the time came for the two to go out to lunch, Tree led the way into an A.B.C. shop. There, taking off his hat to the waitress, he said, "Madam, will you please give this gentleman a nice glass of milk and a large bun," and then, turning to the manager, "Pick me up at the Carlton when you have had enough—but do have enough."

Many hard things have from time to time been said about the manager, but it must be admitted that, dealing with so many diverse temperaments as are to be found among audiences and actors, he would be more than human if on occasions his remarks were not—well, human. Just about ten minutes before the show was due to begin, the manager's door burst open and the leading lady burst in. "I

have a doctor's certificate that I cannot sing to-night," she announced, pushing the document in front of the managerial nose. "There is no need for that, Miss X," was the biting reply. "I'll give you a certificate at any time that you never could sing."

Not quite so direct, but equally telling, was a Hawtrey rejoinder. Standing at the end of the stalls one evening, he was suddenly accosted by a haughty stranger who, producing two tickets, said in a lordly manner, "My stalls are B.4 and B.5." "So they are," replied Hawtrey in a voice of silk; "I'm awfully glad to hear it—and now, tell me, how is your wife?"

The theatrical manager is well able to deal with irate actors or actresses, but Sir Augustus Harris once received help in such a matter in a very unexpected form. According to Jimmy Glover's story, a foreign artist, anxious to see Sir Augustus in order to make some complaint, followed him to the Central Criminal Court, where, in his capacity of sheriff, he was sitting with Mr. Justice Hawkins. The indignant foreigner arrived there just as the judge was sentencing three prisoners to terms of fifteen, ten, and five years respectively.

Seeing Druriolanus in the company of such an individual and fearful lest, if he made his complaint, some such sentence would be his lot, he turned and fled.

The entrance of the Jewish element into theatrical management has brought in its train, as might be expected, several good stories. The best of these, perhaps, relates to one of the race who at one time ran a none too prosperous music-hall which was later burned down. Some few months after this accident, meeting a famous comedian, he informed the latter that he was in negotiation for the purchase of another hall. "You know the place. Don't you think it will be a good spec.?" queried the manager. "Don't you think it will go?" "Go," congratulated the comedian, "it will go like the devil—it's wood."

Another manager, also of the chosen race, extensively advertised his show with a bill which read, "For the benefit of the poor. Tickets reduced to 6*d.*" On the following day he was called upon by the secretary of the local distress committee, who enquired when the proceeds of the show would be paid over to him. "There von't be anything to pay over," said the wily manager. "Didn't I put the tickets down

to sixpence so that the poor could all come? ”

Their grandiose manner has been the characteristic feature of many of the managers of small travelling companies and third-rate music-halls. In one such hall, where the manager was well known for his dignified and autocratic bearing, it happened that the turn of a serio-comic lady met with a reception far from flattering; indeed it showed itself in a refusal of the audience to listen further. At this juncture the manager came on the stage and, with a lordly gesture, stopped the music and commanded silence. Then, leading the unfortunate lady by the hand, he advanced to the footlights and thus addressed the discontented audience. “Ladies and gentlemen, I am ashamed, of you. Here is a lovely lady from London who has come among you to interest you and amuse you, and you are so cruel as to treat her thus. Have you considered, ladies and gentlemen, that this lady is honestly endeavouring to earn her daily bread, and when you deliberately endeavour to prevent people from earning their daily bread you——” At this point a half-loaf came from the gallery and hit the orator full on the head and then fell at his feet. Ignoring the insult, or perhaps con-

sidering that to insult him was unthinkable, he continued, "Yes, and adding injury to insult, you even dared to throw bread at her—to throw bread at a poor girl who is doing her best to amuse you. Well, gentlemen, throw bread at her, if you like. Thank God she is not too proud to eat it." Then, picking up the half-loaf, he thrust it into the artiste's hand and led her off the stage with the air of one who had, single-handed, subdued a mob of thousands.

Undoubtedly, however, the best story of managerial stage pride is that told of E. T. Smith by Miss G. Ward. Mr. E. T. Smith, who started life as a manager of a penny gaff, ultimately became manager of Drury Lane. Having attained this position, he was very desirous of obtaining the patronage of Queen Victoria for his forthcoming benefit. One day, seeing the sheriff's officer with a ducal carriage that he had seized for debt, he was struck with a happy idea, and soon made arrangements for a temporary loan of the vehicle. Next he fitted up the sheriff's officers as footmen, from the theatrical wardrobe and drove in State to Buckingham Palace, where, owing to his borrowed plumes, he obtained access to a certain high official. This gentle-

man, however, was not so easily impressed. "Who are you, sir?" he brusquely asked. "I'm the manager of Drury Lane Theatre," replied Smith, and at once proceeded to put forward his request. Hardly had he finished than the explosion came. "Allow me, sir," said the irate 'official, "to inform you that in matters of this kind it is invariably the custom to approach Her Majesty by way of memorial," then, ringing the bell for an attendant, he added, "Show this gentleman out, and be careful whom you admit to me again." A long time later Mr. Smith was the recipient of a letter, signed by the same individual who had so unceremoniously bundled him out of the Palace, commanding the appearance of Mr. Charles Mathews and the members of the Drury Lane Company at Windsor Castle. Now had come the time for retaliation, and Smith replied as follows: "Sir, in reply to your communication from Her Majesty the Queen commanding the appearance of Mr. Charles Mathews and the Drury Lane Company at Windsor on the —, allow me to inform you that it is invariably the custom to approach the manager of Drury Lane Theatre by way of memorial."



## IV

### AMONG THE LESSER LIGHTS

HARD work, patient endurance, and gruelling poverty have at all times provided a background to the history of the lower ranks of the theatre folk, but humour has often turned the ugly and the commonplace into subjects for mirth and laughter.

In this history almost the first surprise is at the comparison of the salaries paid to artistes in their early days with those they drew in later years, when they had climbed to the head of the profession. Bransby Williams tells how at one time he did lightning cartoons for about thirty minutes and sang three songs, for all of which he was handed the princely sum of two shillings. And he was practically kicked out of the building when he suggested that to slightly increase this amount would not break the management. At another time, when quite a youngster, Williams took the place of Mr. Vivian Reynolds (afterwards stage manager to George Alexander) at short notice at the

New Cross Public Hall, playing the part of Danny Mann. It was a quick study, and there was only time for one rehearsal, but Williams managed to make a success of the part and received, as his fee, an Abernethy biscuit, a bottle of ginger beer, and a shilling for his fare home.

Another famous artist, whose commencing salary was something approaching vanishing point, was Whimsical Walker, who for so many years was the star clown in the Drury Lane Pantomime. His first engagement was to tumble about in front of a so-called tumbling booth and be funny, and for this his remuneration was food, lodging, and a penny or two-pence a week.

But, even when an actor obtained an engagement in legitimate drama, the salaries in some travelling companies were by no means royal. Whimsical Walker also tells how, when looking round for employment, he came across a travelling company at Carlisle touring as Royston's Temple of the Drama. Having nothing better to do, he gave a hand in erecting the stage; and when this was completed the manager came to him and said, "Laddie, you have helped us out of a great hole. I will repay

you. You shall to-night play Little Willie in *East Lynne*, and in the second part you shall play the ghost in *Hamlet* and do a spade dance in the graveyard scene." Walker ventured to point out that he knew neither of the parts. "You can read?" queried the manager in a majestic tone. "Yes." "Good, we have a doll in the bed for the dying scene in *East Lynne*, and you will be underneath and read the part. As the Ghost you will read from the part which you will carry as a baton. Don't you worry, I'll make a first-class actor of you yet." So far matters were satisfactory, but at this point Walker delicately suggested the question of salary. "He gazed at me," said the comedian, "as if I had suddenly told him that the Home Secretary would hold out no hope of reprieve." "Money, money," he gasped; "you won't need money. You'll live on the fat of the land; the audience will present you with eggs, cabbages, carrots." Won over by the manager's eloquence, Walker joined up with the Temple of the Drama and at the share-out at the end of the first week drew the magnificent sum of ninepence halfpenny—which later he had to hand back to the manager as a contribution

towards the claim of a man for ground rent.

Even after attaining to the position where he could more or less demand a fixed salary, the actor in stock or fit-up companies was lucky if he got it. Sometimes payment was made in strange ways. Sydney Paxton, joining a stock company at Stalybridge, was offered thirty shillings a week, but more often than not this was paid to him in six rolls of five shillingworth of coppers, so that he was obliged to go and change them at the public-house opposite. The publican incidentally also ran the theatre.

How small until comparatively recent years were the salaries paid to those who had already made some headway in the profession is shown by Mr. H. Chance Newton in his *Cues and Curtain Calls*, where he gives the following list of the principal players and their salaries at the Queen's, Long Acre; incidentally, the theatre building still stands and now houses the Odhams Press.

"Henry Irving (Heavy man and Stage manager) £3 os. od.

Charles Wyndham (Juvenile and light comedy) £2 10s. od.

John Clayton (Walking gentleman) £2 os. od.

Lionel Brough (Low comedian) £3 os. *od.*"

At this period £10 a week was considered a magnificent salary, and was only given to people with a name and record.

Travelling with an old-time fit-up company left much to be desired, and was, in fact, anything but a picnic. For those unfamiliar with the term it might be explained that a fit-up was a show that visited towns boasting no theatre, and consequently carried with it a portable stage, scenery, etc., that could be fixed up anywhere at short notice. The tours or circuits were badly arranged, the halls were usually appalling, scenery and dresses were reduced to a bare minimum, lodgings were of the worst description, and salaries such as to afford only a bare existence. It was no uncommon occurrence after a series of bad nights for a company to get "out on its boxes," which meant that their belongings had been left in pawn with some kindly station-master, who had advanced the tickets in order that they could travel to the next town on the circuit. In one small provincial town the theatre, which bore the high-sounding name of the Theatre Royal, was a ramshackle building which let in the rain to such an extent that there was some-

times two or three feet of water under the stage. On the occasion a fit-up company played *The Babes in the Wood*, in the last scene of which the two little children ascend to Heaven, after being covered up with leaves by the robins, i.e. property birds. On this particular evening, however, as the box in which the babes reposed was ascending, one of the ropes broke and the two were precipitated into something approaching a watery (and dirty) grave. Which unfortunate incident closed the run of the pantomime for that town.

Scenery and stage accessories in such companies were most primitive. Lady Benson tells a story of a melodrama which she once saw played in which there was a most thrilling railway accident. The train was a cardboard one, executed in profile, and the whole strength of the company was called upon to run this locomotive across the stage. "The fact," she says, "that our feet were visible did not seem to detract from the tragedy of the situation, and a piercing shriek in the wings announcing the heroine's awful end brought the curtain down with storms of applause."

The plays performed by these fit-up companies ranged from Shakespeare to *Maria Mar-*

*tin*, with a venture at times into something topical. Mr. Joseph Harker tells of how he was travelling with a company at the time that President Lincoln was assassinated. The enterprising and up-to-date manager of the show at once demanded that a play should be written around the murdered President. The whole cast accordingly got to work and inside two days they produced a three-act play—each act written by a different actor—dealing with the President's life and death. It was a story of love and revenge, the jealous lover shooting the President, who figured in the unsavoury rôle of a betrayer of women. In spite of its libellous character, the play was well received.

Mr. Horace Wyndham in his *Nights in London* describes a typical example of this kind of play in which the heavy father comes down to the footlights and thus addresses the villain: "Listen to me, Your Lordship. You have broken up my business, you have ruined my home, you have sent my son to prison and my wife to a dishonoured grave, and you have seduced my only daughter. But, have a care, Lord Fitz Wallop, I am a man of quick temper. Do not try me too far."

It was not unusual in provincial touring

companies for the play to be adapted to suit the scenery. In one London theatre, however, it was adapted to suit the posters. *The Wandering Jew* was being staged at the Standard Theatre in Shoreditch, when, at one of the rehearsals, the proprietor, who had a habit of buying up pictorial posters and making his productions fit them, burst in with the command to the Wandering Jew, "Hi, there, go back and die under that table." "I can't," protested the actor; "I'm the Wandering Jew, and he never dies." "Look here, my boy," said the proprietor, "I've just put a big pictorial poster up all over the place and it shows a big fight in an American drinking saloon with a chap with his throat cut lying under the table. The picture's got a strip across it, 'The Wandering Jew, Standard Theatre,' and as you are the Wandering Jew you've got to play up to it." Expostulations were all in vain. "This time," said the proprietor finally, "the Wandering Jew dies under a table or he gets a week's notice."

With some of these companies the time spent in rehearsing was reduced to the minimum. J. K. Jerome says: "In the provinces I have known a three-act comedy put on without any



rehearsal at all, and with half the people not even knowing the patter. 'Business' was arranged in whispered consultations while the play was proceeding, and when things got into a more than usually glorious muddle, one or other of the characters would come off the stage and have a look at the book. As for the prompter, after vainly struggling to keep them to one act at a time and to dissuade the hero from making love to the wrong girl, he came to the conclusion that he was only in the way, and going out had a quiet pipe at the stage door and refrained from worrying himself further."

When, in another company, three rehearsals were called, the indignation was extreme. "What do they think we are," grumbled the leading man, "a pack of bloomin' amateur actors?"

One merit might be claimed for this class of company, that it was a school which taught its followers to be content with little. The manager of one such company, on arrival at a new town, was asked by the local manager how many supers he required. "Let me see, laddie," he said. "We want a posse of police in the centre, and a group of soldiers on the prompt side. Then in the next scene there

are two groups of villagers and in the last a London mob. How many supers have you got?" "Two," came the reply. "Two, laddie, two," said the manager; "why, that will do beautifully."

As might be expected, these Number *n* companies did not draw crowded houses. Mr. Joseph Harker tells of how he once travelled with a fit-up company that laboured under the high-sounding name of "The Dublin and Belfast Touring Company." "It was," he says, "a commonwealth company; that is to say, everyone in the company shared the receipts—when there were any." That the qualification is necessary is shown when he goes on to state that at one town not a single person turned up to see the second night of the show, while in another town an audience of five persons was tactfully dispersed by the manager, who, after refunding the ticket money, invited it to have a drink at a neighbouring pub in lieu of a performance.

Arthur Roberts tells the story of a small touring company which found itself playing to a small audience in a small town in Yorkshire. When the time came for the curtain to go up, the audience was found to consist of only two

men. Going on the stage, the manager said, "I am very sorry to disappoint you, but we really cannot play to such a small house. Here is your money back. You'd better go home." "Sorry," said one of the audience, "we can't take it and we can't go. We're the bailiffs in possession."

The typical actor of these companies has now almost entirely disappeared. He was seedy—circumstances, indeed, prevented him from being anything else—he had an insatiable thirst, his usual habit was to turn night into day, and more often than not his only school had been that of hard experience. Such a Roscius, a very minor member of an even more minor cast, approached his manager with a request for an advance of sixpence. "What the deuce do you want sixpence for?" came the question. "Well," said the seedy one, "I've got to play Romeo to-night, and you can't expect me to do it with four days' whiskers on my face." "Perhaps not," said the manager, "but you won't get any money out of me. We'll play Othello instead."

A similar actor, one evening playing the part of a Duke, much amused the audience by saying to his daughter, "Let us now go into the

'ouse." There was a titter in the theatre, and someone in the stalls remarked rather too audibly, "He said 'ouse." The indignant actor advanced to the footlights, froze the speaker with a look, and after an effective pause sneered, "Yes, I did say 'ouse. Do you fink a Jook would live in lodgin's."

This old-time worthy, travelling as he did, with a very limited wardrobe, and occupying lodgings where bath-rooms were usually non-existent, was often none too cleanly in his person. It is told of one comedian that, having a part in which black stockings were required, and these forming no part of his wardrobe, he blacklead his legs. After the show he asked the stage manager, "Do we play this piece again?" "Yes," was the reply, "next week." "Good," said the comedian; "then I needn't wash my legs."

Such actors, failures themselves, were very often the severest critics of their more illustrious colleagues. An elderly mummer in a Bodega was observed to be gazing at a poster of Forbes-Robertson as Hamlet. After looking at it for a moment or two in silence, he turned to his companion and said scornfully, "'Im showing as 'Amlet. What next? You

should have seen my 'Amlet. They still talk of it at Salisbury. Lord, what a production! The cast? 'Is Melancholy Nibs, your 'umble servant, Ophelia, the lady I was living with at the time but whose name I disremember, and the Ghost, Mr. Forbes-blooming-Robertson. Rotten! Thank you, laddie, I will 'ave another."

This stern criticism of their more successful brethren was inevitably accompanied by an almost pathetic attempt to enhance the dignity of their own humble rôle. A well-known dramatic author once found himself seated in a theatre next to an old actor who claimed to have been with Irving and to have made a great hit in the latter's revival of *Macbeth* at the Lyceum. "Indeed," said the old actor proudly, "Charles Wyndham met me a few days after my performance, and his words as he shook my hand were, 'Magnificent, my dear sir, magnificent!'" Wondering to what unknown genius he was talking, the author asked what particular part he had played. With great dignity came the reply, "The part, sir, which Sir Henry entrusted to me was only a small one, though I venture to think that the beauty of the whole story lies in that very fact.

I did the groan of the dying Duncan."

Several old actors who had met together had in the usual manner enlarged on their triumphs. At last an old mummer took up the running. "I was a riot at Manchester," he said. "The audience had me back over and over again. Matter of fact, laddies, they were so good to me that after my turn I went round to the front of the house and shook hands with both of them."

Two comedians, somewhat down on their luck, had obtained an engagement at Dublin, but having got as far as Holyhead, they found their remaining funds were insufficient to pay the passage. They searched round and found a kindly skipper of a cargo boat who offered to take them over at a nominal rate, they being the only passengers. Arrived at Dublin, the ship was hailed by the Customs Officers, who asked of what the cargo was composed. "A load of guano and two actors," was the reply. "Good gracious, Bill," said one comedian to the other when he heard the answer, "aren't we ever going to top the bill?"

But however hardly Fate may have dealt with him, this type of actor preserved his faith in his own talents. One such was giving evid-

ence in a Law Court, and in the course of cross-examination was asked what sort of actor he would describe himself to be. For a moment or two he considered the question, and then, with an apologetic cough, said, "Well, if you insist upon the question, I must say that I am possibly one of the best living English actors." Outside the court a colleague, who had heard the reply, tackled the witness on the statement that he had made. "Well, old man," came the reply with all the dignity of an Irving, "you appear to forget that I was on oath."

Sometimes, however, it happens that this desire to be in the public eye is caused by reasons other than pride. A certain minor actor, whose usual rôle was that of serving-man or one of the crowd, had, at one point, to go on the stage and announce, "My Lord, the coach is waiting." On one particular evening, to the astonishment of everyone, he turned to the gallery and, in a voice of thunder, shouted, "And permit me further to observe that the man who raises his hand against a woman, save in the way of kindness, is unworthy of the name of a Briton." Shouts of applause greeted the statement, for melodrama was still a vital factor in the entertainment of that neighbourhood. At

the conclusion of the play the manager not unnaturally wanted to know the reason for the sudden and irrelevant interpolation. "Well, guvnor," replied the culprit, "I regret to have annoyed you, but you see it's my benefit next week, and I must make myself popular with the audience."

Leading a life of the most Bohemian description, many of these actors were more of a social than a theatrical success, and their knowledge of "houses of call" and such-like resorts was sometimes extensive and peculiar. One of this description, seeking a job, handed in a testimonial which described him as a man of parts, concluding with, "He plays Macbeth, Hamlet, Shylock, and billiards. He plays billiards best."

The "supers," of course, have not failed to contribute their quota to the humour of the stage. Once, when the Benson Company were playing in a Scotch town, the fairies required in the play were engaged locally. Lady Benson saw a crowd of stout elderly females round the stage door, all engaged in animated and acrimonious discussion, and told the stage manager to tell those mothers that they must not wait outside, but could return later for their



children. "Mothers," said the manager. "Why, those are the fairies."

When Tree first produced *The Merchant of Venice* he found his recruits for "the crowd" in the East End; the pay for each appearance was two shillings. In this scene the Christians pretended to spit at the Jews. After the first night one of the crowd asked to see Tree. "Make it a round guinea a week, guvnor," he pleaded, "and those — Christians may really spit at me."

In a production of *Much Ado about Nothing*, a super was selected to instruct his colleagues as to the part they would play in the Church scene. His instructions, as overheard, ran as follows: "This 'Ero, let me tell you, is a perfect lady, a nice innercent young thing, and when the fellow she's engaged to calls 'er an approved wanton, you naturally claps yer 'ands to yer swords. A wanton is a kind of—well, you know she ain't what she ought to be." Seven or eight times the supers clapped their hands to their swords without giving any satisfaction. "No, no, no; that's not a bit like it, not a bit. If any of your sisters was 'ere and you 'eard me call 'er a — would yer stand gaping at me as if this was a bloomin' tea-

party? ”

And the call-boy, of course, must have his story; his occupation tends to make its followers automatic, as witness the story told by Seymour Hicks of a call-boy who, during a time when the theatre to which he belonged was closed for repairs, obtained a job as undertaker's mute. Part of his duties in this capacity was to follow behind the hearse looking as mournful as possible. Walking one day with lowered head, but with his thoughts reverting to his former occupation, he heard in the distance the strains of a military band. Assuming at once that it was the sound of the orchestra, he unconsciously knocked at the door of the hearse and, opening it, shouted, "Overture and beginners, please."

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## V

### PRACTICAL JOKES

THE theatrical profession appears always to have had a love of practical joking, a trait developed in common with the university and the medical school.

Perhaps this emerges out of the fact that the theatre world is largely a world apart—a fantasy-world, a kingdom of “let’s pretend,” a realm, in some respects, of childhood, where the more elementary forms of humour are, as in boyhood, very much in the ascendant—and a place in which the sentiment “Men are but children of a larger growth” seems fully proved.

Practical joking was at one time much more in vogue in stageland than it is to-day. No doubt it has been killed by the modern spirit of commercial exploitation. Purloining clothes that were required at a moment’s notice, the laying of booby traps for the unwary, or the writing of fulsome letters of adulation from some supposed admirer to the more impressionable male members of the cast—these were

elementary forms, but the dressing-rooms were hardly ever free from the laughter of which they were the cause.

The prince of practical jokers in his time was undoubtedly J. L. Toole. He was the embodiment of the spirit of farce and burlesque; and at all times the life and soul of any company in which he might happen to be placed. It is safe to say that at one time there was no more popular figure in England than that of Mr. Toole, and the story of his latest escapade was as quickly in circulation as a new joke on the Aberdonian or the Ford car is to-day. To enjoy these stories, however, to the full it was necessary to know Toole. Without the merry twinkle of the eye, the quizzical twist of the mouth, the quaint chuckle, the personal colour, all so typical of the man, much of the joke was lost.

It is difficult to decide on the best out of so very many, but Lady Bancroft used to tell of one exploit that requires a good deal of beating. She had gone, together with a party of stage friends, to see the much-talked-of panorama of *The Siege of Paris*. To their annoyance, they were followed into the building by a strange-looking creature who persisted in

hanging on to their party, all the time muttering something under his breath. Added to this, his appearance was such as to at once attract attention. He wore a slouch hat and the collar of his coat was turned up, but his outstanding feature was his moustache, which seemed to grow upwards in the most singular manner. To the great annoyance of the party, they were unable to shake the fellow off, and he continued to follow them everywhere, at the same time indulging in nudges and mutterings which cast doubts upon his sanity. Presently he became more violent in his gesticulations, but just at the point when the party had agreed on the desirability of calling the attention of the management to him, the weird-looking moustache fell to the ground and revealed the well-known features of Toole.

A favourite victim of Toole's was Joe Eldred, his stage manager. Playing once in Dublin, the company were giving *Oliver Twist*, in which Toole played the Artful Dodger, and Eldred the part of Fagin. Eldred had one long speech to make in this rôle, and he took a particular delight in this opportunity, knowing which, Toole laid his plans accordingly. Getting hold of the two supers who were acting

as policemen, he told them that after arresting him and removing him from the stage they had also to arrest Fagin, and that he would be at the wings to let them know the precise moment at which to effect this. "Remember," added Toole, "as part of the play, Mr. Eldred will be sure to protest, and even perhaps to struggle, but you are to take no notice of that." Next evening Eldred had begun his favourite speech when the supers, at a sign from Toole, hurried on, and in spite of his expostulations and struggles carried him willy-nilly from the stage. The realism of the struggle brought down the house.

Nor in his practical joking did Toole confine himself to the theatrical world. It is said, for example, that he would sometimes go into a fish shop and enquire where he could get some *fresh* fish. When told that he had come to the one and only place, he would counter with the remark that he meant *real* fish. From this point the conversation, led by Toole, would meander over a wide and irrelevant field, until the humorist would suddenly give a start, as if he were waking from a dream, and with the remark, "Oh dear, I beg your pardon, I thought this was a chocolate shop," he would

stalk majestically from the premises.

These jokes seem almost childish, as does his favourite trick of knocking at a door and enquiring if they had in the house such a thing as a bit of groundsel for a sick bird. Another joke of the same calibre was perpetrated when he was travelling by rail, and coming to a station where he knew they collected tickets, he filled one of his gloves with cotton-wool until it assumed the shape of a human hand. He next contrived to arrange it in front of his coat so that it appeared to be one of his own and placed his railway ticket between the fingers. A minute or two later the door was opened and there came the demand, "All tickets, please." "Take mine," said Toole pleasantly, and the collector did—and the hand as well.

Of possibly higher merit is a story told in connection with Attenborough, the famous pawnbroker. Toole was going home from his club about four o'clock one summer's morning, and stopped his four-wheeler at Mr. Attenborough's private house, where he rang the bell. No reply came from the sleeping household, and he commenced throwing gravel at the windows. Soon a window was thrown open and the head of the owner of the house

appeared. "What do you want?" he sternly demanded. "I want to know the time, please," said Toole in his most dulcet tones. "Time," came the indignant reply. "How dare you ring me up like this! Haven't you a watch?" "No," said Toole, "that's the difficulty. You've got it!"

Toole's jokes were not always successful; there are at least three instances of his being hoist with his own petard.

He was walking with Bram Stoker near Marlborough House when he suddenly took from his pocket a letter, which he had ready to post, and walking across to one of the red-coated sentries, as if semi-blind, he endeavoured to push it into the breast of the soldier's tunic. Without moving a muscle, the soldier watched his attempts and then quietly said, "It's all right, Mr. Toole. I hope you're well."

On another occasion he gave a grand party for which he had made the most elaborate preparations, even—in true Toole style—going to the length of tying bunches of grapes to holly bushes, peaches to yew trees, and oranges to laurel. Later it was noticed that the garden was gradually becoming crowded with people who had obviously not been invited, and it



was then discovered that two brother actors had stationed themselves at the gate and invited all and sundry to come in and see the show.

The third instance of the biter being bit is, however, remarkable for its completeness; in it Toole was twice fooled. The perpetrators were David James and Tom Thorne, both of whom had made a great success in *Our Boys*. Through their instrumentality, on the occasion of his birthday, Toole received from the Hon. Lewis Wingfield an invitation to supper to meet the Lord Chief Baron and the Attorney-General for Ireland. On the evening affairs went very well up to a point—Toole being on his best behaviour—when suddenly the two legal luminaries commenced to dance round him, and throwing off their disguises revealed themselves as James and Thorne. Toole took the joke in good part, but offered to bet them that they would not fool him on his next birthday. When the next anniversary came round, Toole was not acting, and accordingly had asked some friends down to dinner. Just as they were leaving, and he was seeing them off at the front door, a cabman drew up and demanded seven-and-sixpence. “What for?”

asked Toole. "Come now, Mr. Toole," said the cabby, "you ain't forgotten it. Why, the other night when I drove you home, you said you'd got no change, and I was to come for it to-night." "Nonsense," replied Toole, "you've never driven me home. Why, I've never seen you before." At this point a second cabby drove up and vouchsafed the information that he had witnessed the circumstance. He was followed by a third, enveloped in a huge cape, who also offered confirmatory evidence. By this time his guests were looking somewhat askance at Toole, being rapidly forced to the conclusion that he had attempted to bilk a poor cabby, when suddenly the two last arrivals pushed two parcels into his arms with the remark, "Many happy returns of the day." The first cabby, who had been coached in his part, was the genuine article, and the last two were once again James and Thorne.

Two actors often associated with Toole in his practical jokes were Sothern and Brough. Once, when playing the part of the two poor old men in *Dearer than Life*, Brough and Toole walked out of the theatre in the rags that they wore on the stage and made their way to a certain large house in Grosvenor Square, the

occupier of which was a great snob and well known for his pride in himself and his money. Arrived at the house, the two knocked at the door, which was answered by a gorgeous flunky resplendent in blue coat and knee-breeches. "Master in?" queried Toole. "No, he is not in," said the footman, disdainfully staring at the two disgraceful creatures thus polluting the aristocratic neighbourhood. "Not in?" and with the two words Toole managed to convey all the blankness of the disappointment that comes when the expected drink fails to materialise. "Tell him his two brothers from the workhouse called to see him."

Sothern, co-operating with Toole in many of the jokes that he had perpetrated, was not far behind him in some of those which he brought off himself. He once stayed at an old-fashioned residential hotel, where he found that it was the practice for the oldest resident to preside as chairman at dinner. Sothern learned one day that the usual president had been called away, and accordingly sent a note in the name of the landlord to all the other male residents, asking them, in the absence of the chairman, to say grace that evening, the

signal for this being two raps on the sideboard. When the time arrived, the taps were given by Sothern himself, and the confusion that followed when some fifteen persons got up and each started on his own particular form of thanks was more than ludicrous.

He once called at the shop of an undertaker and gave explicit directions for a most elaborate funeral. About half an hour after he had left the premises he returned again and enquired when he could count on getting possession of the body. "Possession of the body, sir?" said the startled undertaker. "I don't understand you." "Of course I mean possession of the body," said Sothern in feigned anger. "You provide the body, don't you? Look at your card— 'All things necessary for funerals promptly supplied.' Isn't a body the very first necessity?"

At another time he was going down a London street with a friend when he suddenly said, "You go ahead and take the next King's Cross bus, and I'll drop back and take the same." The friend, knowing Sothern's tendencies, did as he was told, and on entering the next bus saw the actor already sitting in one corner. Looking at him to see what was the next move

in the game, he was startled by Sothern suddenly glaring at him and saying, "Are you staring at me, sir?" Quick to take up his cue, the other replied, "No; if I wanted to stare at anyone, I should stare at a better-looking man." From this point it was not difficult for the two to work up a good specimen of a street row, and before long, much to the horror of the other passengers, Sothern was taking off his overcoat and challenging the other to come outside, winding up with the assertion that "he wouldn't allow anyone but his old friend John Robinson of Philadelphia to talk to him like that." "But I am John Robinson," said Sothern's friend. "Of Philadelphia?" "Yes." On this the two embraced and left the bus, leaving the other passengers to wonder over this strange rencontre.

Two further illustrations of his father's fondness for practical joking are given by E. H. Sothern in his *My Remembrances*. The first occurred when he formed one of Laura Keene's company playing in New York, on which occasion he put an advertisement in the papers, and caused bills to be distributed, to the effect that Professor Cantellabiglie (can tell a big lie) would fly from the top of Trinity Steeple at

noon on a certain day. At the time appointed the crush of people in the vicinity was so great that the police had some difficulty in handling the huge crowd. Twelve o'clock arrived and nothing happened, and then someone studying the name on the bill discovered the joke.

On the second occasion he was out for a day's fishing and, though no one else could get a bite, Sothern appeared to be pulling up fish after fish. Thinking it was due to the locality he had selected, the fishermen in the other boats followed him, but still met with no success. At the end of the day, as his boat approached the shore, he held up fish after fish, showing an apparently countless catch, and it was only when the boat was beached that it was discovered that his catch was the one fish which had done duty over and over again.

Usually working together to "spoof" the general public, there were times when Toole and Sothern tried to "pull it off" on each other, the honours of war going sometimes to one and sometimes to the other. One day Toole and a friend had agreed to meet Sothern at a small chop house in the city, and arriving first amused themselves by watching an old gentleman greedily devouring a chop. [Toole, who,

had never seen the old gentleman before, scented the possibility of fun, and went up and, slapping him familiarly on the back, greeted him with, "Hello, George, my dear old fellow, how are you?" Full of indignation, the diner jumped to his feet and demanded to know why the —— and who the —— dared to salute him in that familiar way. Making an ample apology for his mistake (?), Toole and his friend then withdrew to another part of the room. Later they were joined by Sothern. "Queer-looking old fellow over there," said Toole after some conversation; "I've a good mind to step over, slap him on the back, call him George, and tell him it's years since I last saw him." "Let me do it," said Sothern. "Well," replied Toole, "it was my idea, but I don't mind for once giving way to you." Without more ado, Sothern crossed over and carried out Toole's suggestion to the letter. In a moment the old gentleman was on his feet, the very embodiment of fury. "How dare you, you ruffian!" he spluttered. "Don't tell me you made a mistake. You did it on purpose. Landlord, landlord, what is the meaning of this? This is the second time I've been assaulted and called George within the last ten minutes."

Tree was a close rival to Toole in the matter of practical joking. His best effort was achieved at Cambridge in 1877, shortly after he had taken to the stage. At the time he was staying at Trinity College with a friend, and both of them had received an invitation to dine at the great banquet of the Hibernian Club, given in the Guildhall, at which some two hundred guests were expected. All went merrily until it came to the toast of the guests, to which a distinguished old Irish peer had been asked to respond. Before he could do so, however, Tree was on his feet. "Mr. President, and gentlemen," he began, "I thank you from my heart for the gracious way in which you have drunk our health. I will not inflict a long and tedious speech upon you, but I will instead give you a few imitations of popular actors. We will commence with Mr. Henry Irving. 'Eah, daunt you hear the sound of the bell-ll-ll-lls?'" By this time the noble responder to the toast was looking as if about to indulge in an apoplectic fit, while the chairman, hastily summoning a waiter, gave him a message. The waiter approached Tree, but was waved aside with an imperious gesture as he plunged into an imitation of Kean. More notes



now followed from the chair, but were again waved peremptorily aside while Tree continued his impersonations of Toole, Macready, Phelps, and others. Finally he sat down, upon which the angry peer rose and endeavoured to make his long-delayed speech; but his indignation was so great that he could not utter a single word, and finally had to resume his seat speechless.

Another Tree story has almost a Toole flavour. Playing once in Dublin, he went to the General Post Office and demanded to see some stamps. Asked what price stamps he wanted, he said he would be glad to see some varieties, and, this strange request being complied with, he asked numerous questions as to their respective values. Finally picking on a green one, he once more asked the price. "That is a halfpenny stamp," replied the clerk. "Only a ha'penny," said Tree in tones of obvious admiration, "and so pretty too. I really must have one of those and keep it."

Like Toole, Tree was also sometimes beaten at his own game, and on one occasion he sustained a severe defeat at the hands of Colonel Lowther. The occasion was that of a visit to the Colonel at Hurstmonceaux Castle. One

day, strolling round the grounds, Lowther and Tree were approached by a party of trippers, who begged permission to go over the castle. It was, however, not one of the days when the public were admitted, but the party pleaded that an indulgence might be made in their case, as they had come a long way for the express purpose of seeing the castle. Turning to the party, Colonel Lowther said, "I am not Colonel Lowther ; this gentleman " (turning to Tree) " is the colonel." Taking up the rôle thus imposed upon him, Tree with a grand air informed the visitors that they were at liberty to go over the castle, and in addition to pick as many of the famous peaches as they liked. Then, pointing towards the dumbfounded Colonel, he added, "I am sure you will all be glad to know that this gentleman is the celebrated actor, Sir Herbert Tree." "Yes," said the Colonel, jumping at the opportunity of equalising ; "and if at any time any of you would like to visit my theatre, I shall be only too pleased to place boxes or stalls at your disposal."

Another actor, not perhaps so well known, but a past-master in practical joking, was Billy Stevens, of the Gaiety. Once, seeing a notice, "NO THOROUGHFARE. ROAD UP," he got hold

of the foreman in charge of the work and inveigled him into a neighbouring public-house. Next he persuaded two friends, by whom he was accompanied, to hold the foreman in conversation for a little while, during which he slipped out. Noticing a cabman's shelter, he told the workmen that it must come down at once, and that he had been specially sent down to give instructions about it. Under the eye, as they thought, of someone from the head office, the men worked with a will, and when the foreman returned, the cabstand had been already levelled to the ground.

When playing in a provincial town, he went into a butcher's shop and purchased a leg of mutton, giving instructions that it was not to be wrapped up and that it was to be left lying on the slab by the door so that he could pick it up easily on his return. Hanging about at some little distance from the shop, he waited until he saw a policeman approaching, when he dived into the shop, snatched up the uncovered leg of mutton, and ran off as hard as he could. He was followed by the policeman, who ultimately caught him and took him back to the shop, where it was made clear that he had only stolen his own property. The policeman was

compensated for being so fooled by an order for himself and his wife to the theatre.

Charles Brookfield, of all the members of the theatrical profession who have been conspicuous for their keen and biting wit, stands out most prominently ; it is therefore the more surprising to find that on occasions he would descend to the more elementary practical joking, though in extenuation it might be pleaded that the specimen here given, as told by Miss Ellen Terry, was not so much a joke as an example of power of personation. While they were acting at Buxton, and as they had no parts in one of the plays, Brookfield and Kemble amused themselves on their "off" nights by hiring bath-chairs and pretending to be paralytics. The performances at the time were being given in a hall, and it was the custom for the invalids to be brought in their bath-chairs and wheeled up the centre aisle. "In the middle of a pathetic scene," said Miss Terry, "I caught sight of Kemble and Brookfield in their bath-chairs, and I could not speak for several minutes."

It is not generally known, and will come as a surprise to most people, that Irving was particularly fond of practical jokes, and on more

than one occasion assisted Toole in his perpetrations. Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson tells of one in which Irving played the principal part. As a young man he was touring in Ireland, and during the course of the tour he had a violent quarrel with the stage manager. This was subsequently made up, but, seeing the chance of a good joke, Irving did not tell the others. A few days later a trip to Killarney was arranged, and during the walk from the station Irving and the acting manager hung back behind the others and appeared to be engaged in a violent altercation. The rest of the party were allowed to get out of sight; Irving then cut his finger, smeared his face with blood, bound up the finger with his handkerchief, loosened his collar and tie, and ruffled his hair, after which he hastened on after the others, while the acting manager remained behind. Reaching them alone in this disordered state, there was an immediate cry of, "Where's Jack?" "He's lying by the roadside half a mile back," was Irving's reply. "Irving," said one of the company in great alarm, "there's blood on your face." "Is there?" said Irving calmly. "Then please wipe it off." The calmness of the presumed murderer so astonished

his questioner that he stepped quickly back, and in doing so fell into the lake.

Practical joking on the stage appears to have been the prerogative of the male actors, yet, at least on one occasion, the culprit was a lady—Gladys Cooper. It was during the run of *The Last of Mrs. Cheyney*, and the date appropriately enough was April 1st. Aided and abetted by Herbert Chown, the stage manager of the St. James's Theatre, Miss Cooper on that evening introduced several novel and unique features into the play. "In place of his usual choice cigar, Ronald Squire was given one that gave off little bangs when he lighted it. Several ladies of the caste were provided with wafers with flannel inside them instead of their nice sweet ones. Violet Campbell, who had to eat an apple and always took a good hearty bite, found herself with a mouthful of soap, and Ellis Jeffreys, who was supposed to mark a bridge score, found himself wrestling with a pencil with a flabby point. Spoons that crumpled up when you tried to stir with them were other devilish stage props which we provided for the general discomfiture, and soon nearly everyone in the play was in a condition of dither, not knowing what to expect next, and muttering

angrily under their breath. Gerald du Maurier guessed that sooner or later he would be a victim, and when it came to having to open a parcel, he did his best to avoid doing so lest something popped out and hit him in the face. He had to do it in the end and the parcel was empty. Greatly relieved, he sank into a chair on to a cushion that proceeded to give out awful squeaks."

The music-hall, as might be expected, has not been far behind the legitimate stage in this matter of practical joking, and among the perpetrators Dan Leno takes a prominent place. It has been said that he never could resist the chance of a practical joke. Undoubtedly one of his best efforts was that which he pulled off while playing in a Drury Lane pantomime, during which a huge cracker was brought on the stage, and after a certain amount of fooling, was pulled and broken by Dan and his colleague. It was then found to be full of small crackers, with which the two pelted the audience. One night, however, when the cracker was pulled asunder, it was found that Dan had been at work, for out rushed a number of cats which, scared to death, scattered over the stage or jumped into the orchestra and

private boxes.

Another good story, told by J. H. Wood, belongs to the early days of the famous comedian, when he was on tour together with his life-long friend Johnny Danvers. As Dan looked out of their sitting-room window on the afternoon of November 5th he commanded a good view of the backyards up and down the street. His attention was soon attracted by the man next door, who was building a bonfire. When he had completed it he hung up his guy, stuffed it with fireworks, saturated the bonfire with paraffin and then went indoors to await the time when it would be dark enough to give his brilliant display. Having watched the man into his house, Dan said to his companion, "I'd give all the money I hope to possess to light that fire now." "It's too far away," replied Johnny. "Is it?" returned Dan. "You just wait here till I come back, and then you'll see." He disappeared, and in a few moments returned with some Roman candles. One of these he lit, and with a lucky shot landed it right in the middle of the bonfire. In a moment the flames were roaring high, the guy had tumbled into the fire, and the fireworks were popping off on all sides. The owner of the bor-



fire never discovered the culprit, but insult was added to injury when, on the following morning, he received a card on which was written :

BIRTHS  
ON THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 5TH,  
AT — STREET, LIVERPOOL,  
MR. — OF A BONFIRE,  
PREMATURELY.

Whimsical Walker tells of how, going into a provincial hotel, he was once mistaken by the landlord for the advance agent of a Shakespearian company that was shortly visiting the town. He played up to this, extolled the company to the skies, and even went to the length of saying that it consisted entirely of celebrated London actors and actresses who were appearing under assumed names. Fired by this description, the landlord at length timidly suggested that he should like a pass for himself and his wife for the local early-closing night. Walker at once complied by writing out one admitting three persons to Box B, signing it "Hookey Walker." Following this came requests from all the customers in the bar, with all of which "the advance agent" cheerfully

complied, signing the passes in different names. History does not record what happened when so many bogus free passes rolled up to the box on the best night of the week.

Another joke by Walker was worked in conjunction with Arthur Roberts, when in the early morning hours they rode back from the club to their hotel in Sheffield on a street sweeper. The spectacle of these two in evening dress riding on the strange vehicle with its huge brush must have been ludicrous in the extreme. This, however, did not conclude their early-morning enjoyment. Arrived at the hotel, they were let in by the night porter through the iron-latticed door, and this gave the pair another idea. Going down on their hands and knees, they commenced crawling round and round as if they were caged wild beasts, growling from time to time at the rapidly increasing crowd. Then the manager, hastily summoned from his bed, intervened, and the show came to an end.

Once, however, Whimsical Walker met his match, and this at the hands of a partner in crime, Dan Leno. Walker had ordered a puppy from a dealer in the north, and coming home one night found that the animal had arrived during the day. He also found Dan

awaiting him in a high state of indignation. He had, according to Dan, been guilty of the grossest cruelty in having the dog sent in so small a box and without either food or water. It was a case which the R.S.P.C.A. should take up. Recovering from his first shock, Walker drew the nails from the box and put in his hand to take out the puppy, only to find that it was stone-cold. "I'm afraid it's dead," he said, and then pulling out the body, with the thoughts of impending prosecution rushing through his mind, he found it was the pantomime dog which Dan had borrowed from the theatre property room, sending, in the meanwhile, the real puppy round to his own house.

Carlton is another variety star who has been a prolific contributor to practical joking. He tells a most amusing story of how he once made up his face to look haggard and worn, as if he had passed a sleepless night. Coming downstairs, he told his landlady, a believer in spiritualism, that he believed her house was haunted by spirits. "They've been walking about all night upside-down on the ceiling above my head," he explained. A visit to his room disclosed the fact that there were marks of naked feet on the white ceiling, and at the

sight of them the landlady collapsed. The marks had been made by a friend of Carlton's, an acrobat, who, having blackened the soles of his feet, had balanced himself head downwards on Carlton's shoulders and thus performed the apparently impossible task.

Another of Carlton's jokes was carried out by him when coming back from America. A large number of American pros. coming over to England for the first time were on the same boat, and becoming friendly with Carlton, they asked him if he could give them the address of some decent "digs" in London. The one he gave, in every case, was "10 Downing Street," to which address, when they arrived at Euston, the whole party drove off in taxis.

Dan Leeson had a favourite trick, which was to buy a fish, cut it open, fill it with gunpowder, and then, after sewing it up again, take it home to his landlady and ask her to grill it for breakfast. At other times he would go into a public-house where slabs of cheese were displayed on the counter and mix among them similar pieces of soap.

Once, being dissatisfied with the way the orchestra played his music, this humorist obtained a kipper, which was in a fairly advanced

state, and stuffed it in the bass viol. The kipper soon made its presence felt, not only among the orchestra, but also among the stalls. The management could not locate the cause and called in a sanitary engineer, on whose advice the floor was taken up; but still the smell continued. The nuisance only ceased with the final mummifying of the fish, but neither the cause nor the culprit was ever discovered.

It is not often that a practical joke is of any monetary value to the joker, but this once happened to Henry Hermann, the dramatist. He left his club late one night, called a hansom, and asked to be driven to his house. Shortly before reaching his destination, he called upon the driver to hurry. In response to this request the driver slashed at his horse with the whip, whereupon there came a yell from the inside of the cab, followed by a demand for the cabman to pull up. Directly he had done this Hermann jumped out with his handkerchief held to his face with one hand and in the other holding out his glass eye. "Look what you've done, you clumsy brute," he shouted; "you've cut my eye out with your whip." The cabman took one horrified look, and then, turning his horse about, galloped away into the darkness without

waiting for his fare.

The ideal practical joke is undoubtedly one that, causing a general laugh, hurts no one, and under this definition two examples must claim a high place. An individual who, in his own opinion, was a very superior person, once thought to snub a celebrated music-hall artist by telling him that he had never heard the song which had deservedly made the star famous. Next day nearly fifty piano organs played it outside his house.

The second story is of a well-known comedian whose name must for the present be veiled in anonymity. Time once hung heavily on his hands and he went into a telephone call-box, rang up a number of brother "pros.," and told each one to call up a certain number, "as he was wanted there badly." The recipients of the message did so, only to find that they were talking with Wormwood Scrubs Prison.

## VI

### UNREHEARSED INCIDENTS

OUR laughter at the carefully thought out wit of the author is nothing compared to the burst that sometimes fills the house when a scene takes place that was never planned by either the writer or the players. Accidents, like twins, will happen, and when they do occur their very spontaneity surprises even the most stolid and solemn to laughter.

The most frequent cause of unrehearsed incident is probably that of error, intentional or otherwise, on the part of some stage carpenter or stage hand in the management of the scenery. A leading character in a fairly recent drama was supposed to have been shot and his corpse, laid on a door in the centre of the stage, was surrounded by mourning friends and relatives. At this point, according to the book, the door was slowly hoisted from below and the apparent corpse restored to life, but on one evening the stage hands, by some error, hoisted the door from the wrong end, with the result

that the corpse came to life standing on its head.

A rich Parisian banker, old enough to know better, was in the habit of going behind the scenes and making love to an actress to whom the theatre mechanist was also paying his addresses. One evening he was talking to his charmer, who was already seated upon a stage cloud, when inadvertently he also stepped upon the same piece of scenery. Seizing his opportunity, the mechanist ran the cloud and the curtain up, and the audience had the delightful spectacle of the well-known banker sitting among the clouds by the object of his devotion.

The locked or unlocked door provides a pit-fall for the actor that has often led to comical situations. At one point in the play of the *Three Musketeers* the Queen has given a private audience to D'Artagnan when the King is heard coming. On this the lady-in-waiting, played on the occasion of a Lyceum production by Eva Moore, tries to smuggle the hero out by a private door, and on finding it locked from outside, hammers wildly at it, crying, "Locked, locked! My God, what shall I do?" On one particular evening, however, the locking had been omitted, and when Miss Moore hurled



herself at it crying, "Locked, locked," she fell headlong through, leaving two feet and legs very much in view for the entertainment of the audience.

A somewhat similar accident once befell Clarice Mayne, who, however, was saved by immediate inspiration. She was supposed to be a prisoner in a room and, having tried all the doors only to find them locked, had to return to the centre of the stage moaning, "They are all locked, how can I escape?" Unfortunately as she did this one of the doors flew open and she had no choice but to walk out, an action that might have spoilt the whole plot had she not returned at once saying, "I cannot escape that way; there are armed men in the passage," and, to give colour to her statement, one or two stage hands at once tramped heavily up and down just out of sight.

Miss Clarice Mayne was again placed in an awkward position owing to the neglect of a stage hand when she was playing in *Dick Whittington* at the Palladium. She had to rest on a bank outside London, where she listened to the bells pealing their famous message, "Turn again, Whittington." Having made several references to this bank, she turned towards it,

only to find that it was not there. For a moment or two she was nonplussed, when suddenly the bank appeared, pushed on from the wings. The laughter of the audience at this unwonted appearance turned to a roar when there came a voice from the gallery, "'Ow's that for a blinkin' Lord Mayor's Show?"

A portion of the scenery that has on more than one occasion provided a laugh at an awkward moment is the balcony. Lady Benson tells a story of when once playing *Romeo and Juliet*, and the scenery being slightly inadequate, a balcony was built composed of dress baskets. She had been warned that the construction was so flimsy that she must not walk about, but, forgetting this in the excitement of the play, she moved to and fro, with the result that she was thrown into Romeo's arms, balcony and all.

A more laughable balcony scene occurred during a run of *The Gladiator*, in which play Spartacus, having overcome his opponent in the arena, looks up at the spectators seated in an elevated gallery for the signal "thumbs down" in order to deliver the *coup de grâce*. The occupants of the gallery consisted of some twelve supers and about as many other minor

members of the company, who, while being correctly dressed as to the top half of their bodies, were in most cases wearing trousers or skirts on the lower half, this being hidden by the stone parapet of the gallery. Unfortunately, one night, just when the occupants had given the signal "thumbs down," the floor of the gallery collapsed, with the result that thumbs down became feet up as some twenty-four trousered or stockinged legs were waving wildly in the air.

In his early days as an actor Bransby Williams, also, figured in a ludicrous scene, though, in this case, the balcony was replaced by a prisoners' dock and the actor himself was responsible for the contretemps. In a trial scene he appeared in the dock habited in the ordinary manner from the waist up, but, to save time, as regards his lower limbs he was dressed as a convict. This was concealed by a portion of the dock, consisting of a canvas screen, which he held before him. When, however, it came to the point where the judge passed sentence, he forgot to keep hold of the screen, and, throwing up both his hands, exclaimed, "I am innocent, my Lord, innocent, I swear it." Down went the screen, showing his legs already

encased in trousers well marked with the broad arrows. The conflict between this evidence of guilt and his statement of innocence was too much for an audience that rocked with laughter.

The various stage accessories, next to the scenery, provide, perhaps the most unrehearsed incidents. One of the scenes of *Richard II* is laid on the Welsh coast, and Tree, when producing the play, obtained a background with hills in the distance and in the foreground a mass of broom. To heighten the effect a quantity of real broom was to have been strewn on the stage, but, unfortunately, those responsible put down gorse. "The result," writes Harker, "was that, when at the line 'Let's talk of graves, of worms, of epitaphs,' the lightly clad king threw himself in his grief to the ground, the lines he uttered were not Shakespeare's."

Shakespearian productions, for some unknown reason or other, seem to have lent themselves particularly to comical incidents. Agnes Nicholls, playing in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, after her song "Over hill, over dale," had to make her way off through a stage full of big mushrooms, tree stumps, etc. Unfortunately, sailing off backwards, an awkward

tree stump got in her way, with the result that she did a perfect back somersault.

*Henry IV*, as produced by Beerbohm Tree at the Haymarket, allowed for one of the scenes to end with the stage strewn with dead soldiers. At one performance it was necessary for some scene shifters in the flies to walk across a beam to get to their places, and in so doing they managed to knock off a quantity of dust. This fell on the faces of the dead soldiers, and, to the amusement of the audience, several of them indulged in hearty sneezes.

Faults in stage machinery and stage accessories have given the death blow to more than one tottering play, and even where the result has not been so disastrous as that, they have, at any rate, covered the actors with ridicule. A military drama was on tour, and the manager, anxious to cut down expense on supers, devised a wooden frame on which was fixed rows of wooden soldiers' heads with rifles at the slope. This arrangement was worked by a stage hand, who carried it behind a wall at the back of the stage, the heads and rifles giving from the front the appearance of a regiment marching past. Unfortunately one evening he got a little bemused, and moving in the

contrary direction showed the regiment marching backwards to the war.

Thunder effects were obtained at one theatre by a wheelbarrow full of cannon balls being wheeled over a specially prepared rough surface at the back of the stage. One night there was an accident, the barrow upset, and a dozen or more heavy cannon balls came rolling down the stage. The agility with which an aged and decrepit King Lear jumped for his life sent the audience into paroxysms of laughter.

Sometimes it happens that the misplacement of a very small article will lead to situations that are most comical. In a drama, produced some years ago at Bristol, one character had to get shot and fall on the stage, apparently dead, with his back to the audience. At this point other persons rushed on the scene. "Is he dead?" enquired one. "No," said a second; "his pocket book has saved his life," at the same time usually taking the book from the breast pocket of the prostrate man. Unfortunately on this occasion it was not there, and a further search resulted in it being found in his coat-tail pocket. The pocket book produced from a hiding place least likely to be wounded mortally, sent the audience into peals

of laughter quite unprovided for in the script.

A very strange unrehearsed incident that shows the peculiar mentality of some theatre-goers is told by Owen Nares. It concerns the production of *The Saloon* at the Little Theatre, where a ghost had to cross the stage towards the end of the play, and to obtain effect the stage was plunged in darkness, a small red light being left in one corner as a guide. One night the actress who took the part walked right off the stage and fell into the lap of a gentleman in the front row of the stalls, being unfortunately stunned by her fall. That she had not emerged from the stage was undiscovered until the curtain had been rung down and the audience had quitted the theatre. Search was made, and the poor lady was found in the front row of the stalls, the gentleman on whom she had fallen having kindly propped up her unconscious form in his seat and then taken himself off home without a word.

Costume, of course, provides its humour. Leaving out of question the incongruities often met with in small travelling companies, many occasions have occurred in large companies, where some lapse has sent the audience into uncontrollable laughter. Tree was among

those who have suffered in this respect, for, when playing Falstaff, he was once startled by a burst of uproarious laughter from the audience, which merriment was certainly not caused by the words of the play. Looking down, he saw that the padding had slipped from his right leg, leaving him with one shank of meagre and another of gigantic proportions. As he hastened off the stage to repair the damage, there came another shriek from the audience when one of his bloated cheeks (made of cotton-wool and stuck on with wig paste) fell off, and in his anxiety to hurry off he put his foot on it. On another occasion, playing the same part, he found that "the full round belly with capon lined" was becoming less and less and that he was gradually growing thinner and thinner as the air cushion, with which he was stuffed, subsided through a leak.

Lady Benson describes two incidents in which the Benson Company suffered in a similar manner. Sir Frank, playing the part of Leontes in *A Winter's Tale* at the Stratford-on-Avon Festival, found on one occasion that he had a long wait, and decided to spend the time in a short row on the river. He threw a coat and trousers over his Grecian tunic and hurried



off, but unfortunately miscalculated the time his little expedition would take and only arrived back at the theatre as his cue came. He tore off his coat and rushed on the stage, only to discover, too late, that, in addition to his Grecian tunic, he was wearing grey flannel bags. He at once beat a hasty retreat, shed the offending garment, and then returned to take up his part, which appropriately enough commenced with the words "I am ashamed."

H. O. Nicholson, soon after joining the Benson Company, had to appear in *Richard III* as a "fighting man." Unfortunately, he possessed a very small head, and as the stock of helmets were all of a large size, he finally had to turn out with one that was not too secure on his head. In the *mêlée* his got knocked off, and, rolling across the stage, strewed the field of Bosworth with strange anachronisms in the shape of dirty grease towels and sheets of *Sporting Life*, more familiarly known as the *Pink 'Un*. So much did Nicholson take this incident to heart that in his next contract he insisted on a clause "suitable parts, but no warriors."

Forbes-Robertson came to the rescue in an amusing incident that once took place at the

Garrick, and so successfully that the audience were not aware that anything untoward had happened. In the play, the husband (Forbes-Robertson) was trying to soothe his wife, who was in a distressed condition, when he noticed that the clasp of a necklace of imitation diamonds and pearls that she was wearing had broken, and that the jewels were beginning to drop on the carpet. To get the necklace into his two hands while he was comforting her was comparatively easy, but the question then rose as to how to get rid of them without the knowledge of the audience. "At that moment," said Forbes-Robertson, "she gave a deep sigh, which caused a momentary hiatus between her bodice and her chest. With what I consider a magnificent inspiration I quickly poured the whole lot of them into that slight gap, and got from her a stifled gasping 'Thank you,' and we continued the scene."

The premature rise of the curtain is an event nearly always accompanied by ludicrous results; Jerome K. Jerome tells how one day, when playing with a small travelling company, the sudden and unexpected rising of "the rag" disclosed the following scene: "The king of the country sitting by the side of his dying son.

He is drinking beer out of a bottle. His wig and beard lie beside him on the floor. The dying son touching himself up by the aid of a powder puff and hand-glass. The chief priest of the country (myself) eating a bath bun while a friendly super buttons him up the back."

Another Jerome story concerns a small provincial theatre which possessed only one dressing-room, and this being given up to the ladies, the men had to dress on the stage. Again the curtain went up at the wrong moment to a yell and a stampede, with a stage left looking like the bank of a public bathing pool. "It was," says Jerome, "the greatest success we had during our stay."

## VII

### THE IMPECUNIOUS ACTOR

THE impecunious and needy actor belongs permanently to theatrical life, owing, no doubt, to the general insecurity of his tenure and his often long-enforced periods of resting. The stage, among all professions, stands pre-eminent in giving to its favourites monetary rewards such as are obtained in none other, and yet, on the other hand, dealing out to the rank and file a wage hardly sufficient for a bare existence. "Yes," said the old actor, "I enjoy my little part. As to salary, well, the truth is there isn't much of that, but there's a real pudding in the second act."

This disparity between the payment of the upper and lower ranks is well illustrated by the story of the actor who, playing Richard the Third, did it so badly as to bring down on himself the jeers and hisses of the house. At last, dropping his character, he came to the front of the stage and thus addressed the audience: "Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Kean is playing

this part in London at a salary of thirty pounds a night. I receive only fifteen shillings a week, and if my effort isn't good enough for the money, the Lord above give you a better humanity."

It is characteristic of the hard-up actor that, however "down and out" he may be, he never loses either his courtesy or his pride. A gentleman who had driven up to the stage door of Drury Lane found that he had nothing smaller than a pound note, and the cabman also had no change. Turning to an actor standing near, he asked, "Can you kindly change a pound note for me?" "No, sir," replied the hard-up tragedian; "but many thanks for the compliment."

Two seedy old-time actors with their belongings on their backs were walking from one town to another in the hope of getting work. As they tramped along they were passed by a succession of luxurious cars, which whizzed past, enveloping them in clouds of dust. "Look at them, Henry," said one of the two at length, "rolling past us in luxury, and we starving." "Don't worry about that, dear boy," said the second consolingly; "they may have money, but they can't act."

The shifts resorted to by some of the lower ranks in order to tide over a bad period display an ingenuity that, if directed into right channels, would suffice to secure them from financial stress for the rest of their lives. Only genius could have invented the ruse told in the following story. A well-known actor-manager, anxious, in a forthcoming production, to give a life-like impersonation of a madman, obtained permission to go over a lunatic asylum. While being shown round he observed a man sitting under a tree and counting his fingers, muttering at the same time, "Eney, meeny, miney, moe." "Who's that?" asked the actor. "That's a strange case, sir," said the attendant; "we know nothing whatever about him. He was picked up in the street and brought here. He's quite harmless, but hopelessly mad." The artist's curiosity was aroused, and, leaving the attendant, he walked across to have a look at the interesting patient. "Bless my soul," he said after scrutinising the man. "It's a close resemblance, but surely it can't be him?" Then, addressing the supposed lunatic, he said, "Are you by any chance Jones the actor?" "Here, cut it out," whispered the lunatic. "If they don't find me out I can stay here all the

summer with free board and lodging."

An actor whose spending power was greater than his acting power once approached the manager at Drury Lane, at which theatre he was appearing, and asked for an advance of £20. The application was, however, firmly refused. Not to be done, the actor went off at once and conspired with a friendly pawnbroker, and as a result pawned himself for £20. As a final touch of realism he climbed up on to one of the shelves and stowed himself away there, while in the meanwhile the pawnbroker sent the pawn ticket and a note explaining the circumstances to the theatre manager. As the actor's services were required the same night, the manager had to go hot-foot to the pawnshop and redeem him.

To a gentleman whose finances are in this unfortunate condition any invitation to refreshment, liquid or otherwise, is a veritable god-send, and will be taken advantage of to the full. A certain minor performer on the variety stage was possessed of a good appetite and drinkitite without always the means to satisfy them. Meeting one Saturday with another and more prosperous colleague, the latter asked the needy one to come to dinner on the

following day. They then parted and each pursued his different way, when suddenly the inviter to the feast found the invited one running after him. "Is it beef, Tom?" said the panting one when he had at last caught up his friend. "What do you mean?" said the other. "I mean is it beef for dinner?" "Well," said Tom, "as a matter of fact it is." "I'm so glad," said the hungry one; "it's so nice cold for supper," and then he trotted off happy at having thus quietly secured himself another meal.

A member of the needy brigade was one day enjoying a pint of beer in a well-known theatrical house of call, when another actor came up. "I'll not ask you to treat me, ole man," said the new-comer, "I know you are resting; but damme, laddie, we'll make a loving cup of it," and before the other could object two-thirds of the pint had disappeared.

Naturally, where the income is so small as almost to reach vanishing point, the question of laundry is a very serious one, and the cleanliness of the broken-down actor's linen has always been a fruitful subject for jokes. Two of the old brigade had just met after a long interval, and after the usual greetings one of



them asked, "What about that half-crown I lent you six months ago?" At this question the second man pulled down his cuffs and, after examining them intently for a moment or two, said, "Yes, by Jove, you're quite right. I do owe it, but times are bad just at present. You shall have it, laddie, next time we meet." "Oh, indeed," said the lender sarcastically, seeing his chances of repayment fading farther and farther away; "I think you'd read your memos better if you used white chalk."

Lady Bancroft tells a story of an actor who went into a shop to buy some woollen vests; he was shown some light grey ones and also some brown and showed a decided preference for the former, when the salesman, who evidently knew something about needy actors, strongly persuaded him to have the brown. "But why?" asked the actor. "Are they better made or of finer quality?" "No," came the reply; "but the grey will want washing sometimes, while these [the brown], well . . ."

Pathetically ludicrous shifts have been resorted to when the impecunious actor's one and only suit has been wet through or, alternatively, where he was the proud possessor of two, of which one had to be left behind in part

payment of debts incurred. One such gentleman, having got his one and only suit thoroughly soaked, was compelled to make his way from his lodgings to the theatre dressed only in his underclothes, boots, socks, and a borrowed overcoat. Unfortunately, on the way he was knocked down by a cab, and, though he was not seriously injured, the blow to his pride in being discovered in such a condition was so great that he never recovered from it. Mr. Joseph Harker tells of an actor who, similarly stranded, was compelled to play Hamlet in monkey tights. When it came to the time that he had to repeat the lines, "I have that within which passeth show; these but the trappings and the suits of woe," the effect upon the audience can be better imagined than described.

The impecunious fraternity has faults, but however, it is always ready to give help to an even more needy neighbour, no matter at what personal inconvenience. Two actors, having met in their usual house of call, entered into conversation, and one of them at length remarked, "It seems to me, laddie, that you are not quite yourself to-day; there is something strange in your appearance.

Moreover, your diction does not seem as pure as of yore." "True," said the other; "as a matter of fact, an old pal of mine is seeing a manager to-day about a job, and I've lent him my false teeth."

Another of the old brigade whose luck had been none too good drifted into a post office and asked for a sixpenny postal order. "Ah!" said the bright young lady behind the counter, "for a football competition, I suppose?" "Nay, lassie, nay"—and the actor drew himself up proudly—"for the wife and family."

The manager of a touring company had received an indignant letter from the wife of one of the members complaining that her husband had sent her no money for several weeks. "Look here, Smith," said the manager, "do you ever send your wife anything when you are on tour?" "Oh," said the erring one cheerfully, "I always send my kind regards."

Sometimes it happens that what has come to be known as the "half-crown brigade" fail sadly in their efforts to "touch," and, instead, are invited to listen to some unpalatable truths. One of this crowd was telling the story of his more prosperous days, to be followed later by the request for a small loan. "Yes," he said, "you

wouldn't think to look at me now that once upon a time I used to plead at the bar." "Indeed," said the one about to be touched; "but they would never give you anything after eleven p.m., would they?" Another, whose methods were more direct, was endeavouring to touch a more prosperous colleague. He gave a long recital of his troubles and wound up with, "Starvation is staring me in the face." "Indeed," said the other as he turned away; "how exceedingly unpleasant for both of you."

But, even when unsuccessful, the ready wit of the "toucher" would not appear to be wanting. Entering the stage door, George Robey was once stopped by a resting pro., who wanted the fare to a town in the Midlands where he could get a job. "But," said George, "you pitched me the same tale yesterday and got five bob, but in that case you were going to Portsmouth." "Well," said the other, "what about it? Don't you ever change your patter?"

Impecuniosity has, of course, been the fate in their earlier days of many actors who subsequently rose to wealth and fame. It is said of **Kean** that, not having the toll fare for the bridge, he once swam the Thames to get to a theatrical engagement on the Surrey side, holding aloft

with one hand his theatrical kit while he propelled himself with the other.

Dan Leno used to tell a story of how, in his early days, he found himself in New Brighton, very hard up. As he strolled down the street he passed a restaurant full of people eating the much-advertised shilling dinner, while at the piano one of the customers was making feeble attempts to knock out a tune. Dan was hungry, and this gave him an idea, so, going into the restaurant, he suggested to the proprietor that he should entertain his customers. "Come in," said the latter, "and if you're all right and sing to 3 o'clock, I'll give you a bob and your dinner." The turn, which consisted of song and dance, was successful, but before long the proprietor came in again and whispered to Dan, "Very good, my boy, but you're a bit too noisy. You see, my missus is lying dead upstairs and it jars a bit on me." On this Leno at once dropped into sentimental ballads, but the change was not at all pleasing to the customers. Very soon the proprietor was on the scene once more. "Look 'ere, my boy," he said, "you'd better go back to the comic ones; after all, she can't hear."

Unfortunately, however, many actors, after

they have so risen, have failed to drop their improvident methods, or to adapt their expenditure to their income, with the result that they have been always in debt. It is recorded of Charles Mathews, the great actor, that he was always in financial difficulties; but he never allowed it to worry him, and so great was his personal charm that in no matter what difficult position he was placed, he generally managed to wriggle out of it. Being on one occasion put into gaol for debt, he actually managed to persuade the governor to allow him to attend the local races in his company; and when an irate creditor had forced his way into the Lyceum Theatre and refused to leave until his just demands were met, he was so charmingly received by Mathews that when he came to his senses outside he found that, so far from having collected the amount due to him, he had lent the famous actor another £100.

Another well-known member of the profession whose charm of manner was often utilised to stave off creditors was Barry, at one time proprietor of a Dublin theatre. On one occasion he had got into such low water that he was in debt to all his staff, and the master carpenter determined, at any rate, to get what was due to

him. He accordingly called at Barry's house, and having stated his business the actor came to the top of the stairs and invited him to come up and discuss matters. "No, no, Mr. Barry," said the carpenter, "you owe me a hundred pounds already, and if I come up you'll owe me two hundred before I leave you."

John Palmer, at one time a great favourite with Haymarket audiences, must be included in the same category. It was impossible for him to keep out of debt, and at one period, in order to avoid the crowd of writ-servers waiting for him, he was obliged to live in his dressing-room at the theatre, and when he had to leave Drury Lane to play at the Haymarket, he was taken there in a cabinet among a cart-load of scenery.

The dodging of creditors is not without its humorous side, and Gladys Cooper tells a good story in which the late Charles Hawtrey figures. "He seemed to spend half his life," she writes, "rushing about to get money to stave off creditors, and there is a characteristic true story of how he once dealt with a writ-server. He received the man in the most fascinating Hawtrey manner, accepted the writ gracefully, and insisted on giving the visitor one of his best

cigars. 'Are you doing anything this evening?' he asked presently. 'Have you seen my play?' The man replied that he had not. 'Then, my dear fellow, you must; I insist,' he exclaimed. 'I will get you two seats.' He disappeared and came back with an envelope. 'There you are, my dear chap, two for to-night,' he said. The man, full of thanks, took his departure. What he said when he opened the envelope and found the writ inside, I don't know."

An actor-manager, whose financial condition was never too good, used to work himself up for a particularly tense situation by kicking one of the property men, the usual recompense for this being a subsequent apology and a shilling. One night the house was very thin and the property man had placed himself at the wings for the usual kick; but as the actor passed, he said sadly, "Not to-night, Williams; the treasury won't stand it."

One old-time actor who succeeded in getting his debts paid by another person was Joe Haines, who had just been arrested by two bailiffs for a debt of £20 when his cousin, the Bishop of Ely, drove past. Obtaining leave from the bailiffs to speak to his cousin, Joe ap-



proached the carriage and whispered in the episcopal ear, "My lord, here are a couple of poor fellows who are afflicted with such scruples of conscience that I fear they will hang themselves. Can you do anything to satisfy them?" Calling the two men to his carriage, the Bishop said, "If you two will come to me to-morrow morning at 10 o'clock, I will do my best to satisfy you." On this the bailiffs went off, and so did Joe. Appearing at the Bishop's house next morning, the bailiffs were asked what were their scruples. "Scruples?" they said. "We have no scruples. We've come for the twenty pounds your cousin owes, and you said you would satisfy us." The Bishop paid up.

The landlady is, of course, a person who figures conspicuously in the life of the travelling actor whose means do not permit of an hotel. According to James Welsh, of *When Knights Were Bold* fame, all landladies might be divided into two classes, those who began by calling you "dearie" and ended by calling you "young man," and those who began by calling you "young man" and ended by calling you "dearie."

It is not easy for travelling actors to obtain

lodgings unless they confine themselves to certain scheduled houses, and Lady Benson says that in her early days it was a common occurrence when enquiring for rooms to be told, "We don't take *your* sort," or else something in this kind, "No, thank you; we had a black gentleman here last week, and he went off with a silver spoon. We take no more theatricals." Once, seeking for lodgings in a provincial town, Russell Craufurd knocked at a door, and after a short interval it was opened a little way and a voice said, "Who's there?" "Have you any apartments to let?" asked Craufurd of the voice. "Do you belong to the theatricals?" came the question. "Yes." "God help you," said the voice once more, and the door was slammed in his face. That in the old days the actor in a third-rate company was fully aware of the estimation in which he was held is shown by the old dressing-room joke. "Mother, the actors are coming." "Are they? Then take in the washing."

Moreover, knowing the universal hard-uppishness of the profession, the landlady is apt to be suspicious until she sees the cash. "The window's a bit small," complained one actor who was being shown the rooms. "As

I'm rather stout, it wouldn't be much use to me in an emergency." "There ain't going to be any emergency," replied the landlady grimly; "my terms for actors is weekly, in advance."

According to Lady Benson, the part of the kingdom in which it is most difficult to find lodgings is Scotland. She writes of a visit to Falkirk: "Arrived there, we set out to see if, at so early an hour (it was about 7 a.m., and we had travelled all night), we could find some place for breakfast. After a considerable time we persuaded a cottager to give us food and a wash. The latter we were only allowed to have in a bucket in the back-yard, as our hostess informed us we were breaking the Sabbath and could not perform our ablutions under her roof. After a meal, cooked with great reluctance by this strict Sabbatarian, we set out to hunt for rooms. I was directed to a desolate-looking house which styled itself a temperance hotel, and, after some persuasion, the landlady consented to take me in. While in the bedroom unpacking my bag, I heard the lock turned in the door and a harsh voice shouting, 'Ye'll no raise the blinds nor come out of the room until the kirk is over. I wouldna hae the neighbours ken I had a low play-actress in ma hoose.'"

Judging from theatrical literature, the principal complaint against lodgings has been at all times fleas. Stephen Philips used to tell a story of how he got into one place, and, owing to the usual reason, could get no sleep. As, however, he could get no other rooms, he had perforce to remain there for the whole week. At the end of that period, the landlady, to whom he had made bitter complaints, asked him, "How do you find the fleas now?" "I caught ten last night," replied the actor. "That's good," said the lady; "they're going fast."

H. J. Byron, the dramatist and wit, had very good cause to make a similar complaint. "Fleas, Mr. Byron," said the indignant landlady; "why, there isn't a single flea in the house." "No," said Byron calmly, "they're none of them single; they're all married and have large families."

It would appear, however, that in some cases where a complaint of this kind is made landladies are prepared to meet the complainer half-way. Another of Lady Benson's stories is of an actor who made the usual complaint with no success, but when his bill was presented at the end of the week, he found that he had not been charged for morning tea. "Never mind,"

said the landlady when he called her attention to this, "we'll set that agin' the fleas."

Where conditions such as these prevail, the actor is, as might be expected, not backward in getting his revenge, though few have managed it so successfully as Charles Brookfield, who, asked by a landlady to write something in her visitors' book, cheered her heart by the simple words, "Quoth the raven."

A one-time favourite trick of disgruntled guests was to nail a dried haddock under the flap of the dining-table prior to leaving, and it is from this that the theatrical expression "Giving her the haddock" is supposed to have arisen.

But when her guest has shown any signs of affluence, the landlady was often loud in her praise of him. One good lady is said to have remarked, speaking of Otho Stuart, one of the Benson Company, "He's a gentleman. Twelve shirts in the wash, and he's still got one on. Pity he doesn't take to some gentleman's profession!"

## VIII

### WHEN MEMORY FAILS

STAGE fright, though it is not unknown among tried and experienced actors suddenly faced by some unexpected incident, is, at any rate among novices, the usual cause of failure of memory when on the stage. In the first stage appearance of E. H. Sothern, he played with his father at Abbeys' Park Theatre, and his rôle was that of a cabman. The part was not at all a difficult one; it only consisted of replying to the question, "Now, my good man, what do you want?" with, "'Arf a crown, your Honour. I think you won't object." Unfortunately, however, once he got on the stage young Sothern had a bad attack of fright and could get no farther than touching his hat. To utter a word was a physical impossibility. "Go on," said his father. The only reply was another touch of the hat. "Go on," prompted Sothern senior; "say, 'Arf a crown, your Honour,'" Still there was no reply, only an-

other touching of the hat. "Go on," came the command once more, and seeing this had no effect it was followed by, "Go off," which young Sothern gladly did.

Strange to say, in the case of the novice, the fewer the words to be spoken the more likely they are to be forgotten. H. Chance Newton tells of a young understudy called in to play a part in which he had to come on the stage and say, "Hold, 'tis I, her father—Numitorius." For some reason or other he seemed quite unable to remember this name, and another actor suggested that as a mnemonic he should remember the Book of Numbers. The evening arrived, the understudy rushed on to the stage, and, remembering his cue, proudly exclaimed, "Hold, 'tis I, her father—Deuteronomy."

The actor or actress who forgets the words must either fall back on the prompter or else gag or improvise until the cue can be picked up again. Few, however, have managed this so successfully as a one-time well-known actress who, playing the part of Olivia in *Twelfth Night*, suddenly found that in the scene with the friar she had forgotten her lines and accordingly made her exit with the following:

*"Then lead the way, good father—And  
heavens so shine,  
I can't remember another blessed line."*

There are occasions when even the tried and skilled actor will find himself at fault. According to a tale told by Irving, when Macready was playing in *Pizarro*, the part of the child was taken by a dwarf well on in middle life. Macready did not know this, and while making his way through the angry waters with the child on his shoulder, he happened to stumble, whereupon a deep bass voice, essentially Cockney, yelled out, "For Gawd's sake, cully, don't you go and drop us." This voice, coming from the apparent infant, so upset Macready that for once he forgot his lines.

Among those whose names have come down to posterity on account of their constant forgetfulness of their words, the name of Tom Mead stands pre-eminent. There is hardly a writer on the stage who has not some story to tell of this old player, who, a good all-round actor, was somewhat addicted to looking on the wine when it was red; this, coupled with a faulty memory in his later years, gave rise to some most humorous situations. Once, playing the



Duke in the *Merchant of Venice*, he began his speech in the trial scene as follows: "Make room, and let him stand before our face—Shylock, the world thinks, and I think so too," and here his memory failed and he came to a full stop. "Go on, go on," whispered Irving, with whom he was playing. Still there was silence on the part of Mead. "Go on, go on," whispered Irving testily, and then Mead continued—with the last line of the speech, "We all expect a gentle answer, Jew," and that was all of the long speech that the audience heard that evening.

Another occasion of his forgetfulness caused great amusement among those who knew of his little failings. He was playing in the *Lyons Mail*, and in one place, forced to suspect his own son of a crime, he had to utter the line, "Am I mad or dreaming? Would I were!" And this he rendered as, "Am I mad or drunk? Would I were!"

Mead had the further habit of expressing his thoughts aloud, and when he made an error, his explanation or comment would follow in the same tones that he used in rendering his part. In one play he took the part of a judge, and the hero, of whose title he was not certain,

was brought before him on a false charge. Tom's address to the prisoner ran as follows: "Commendatore Pàul, I mean Signor, no, Monsieur de Paul, you are here before me on a charge of—of (moustache coming off, by God!) —Count Paul, you stand before me on a charge of high treason. Do you realise the terrible position in which you stand? No." Then, not remembering any more of his part, he said, "Jailer, remove your prisoner." "The prisoner," said Forbes-Robertson, who tells the story, "had to make a long speech in his own defence, a speech he had been waiting for all the evening, and he muttered protestations and struggled with the jailer. 'Why am I not obeyed?' said Tom; 'thou naughty varlet, remove the prisoner Paul.' My brother Ian, who was the jailer, saw nothing for it but to lift the protesting Paul bodily from his feet and bear him from the court. There was a pause in the proceedings, broken by a voice from the gallery, 'Paul, Paul, wherefore persecutest thou me?'"

Another occasion found Mead playing in *Iolanthe*, when he spoke of that immortal land "where God hath His—er—room, no—lodging, no—where God has His apartments." Of

course, the word he could not hit was "dwelling." And again, when playing the second witch in *Macbeth*, he found it difficult to remember the ingredients in the witches' cauldron, and it was immaterial to him whether he said cool it with baboon's or dragoon's blood. His asides were always audible to the audience, and this resulted one night in the following, "Cool it with a dragoon's, no, no, guv'nor, I mean baboon's, blood. S'elp me God, I've said it again!"

So well known in his day was Tom Mead that even the gods on high Olympus sometimes stooped to joke with him, and, according to Sir Frank Benson, Irving would sometimes tease him by taking up a position in an unexpected part of the stage. Taking the part of Brabantio, with Irving as Othello, he made his attack on the latter, concluding with, "There stands the man." Then followed the audible soliloquy, "No, no; where the devil has he got to? S'elp me God, he's gone up stage. No, no, my lords, there he is."

His best effort, from our present point of view, however, occurred at the Lyceum in 1879. He had to deliver a long soliloquy, but again the words failed to come. At last he took a

three-legged stool from the front of the inn door and, coming down to the centre of the stage, sat on it, shook his head sorrowfully at the audience, and said, "Here I am." There was a hush in the house, who were waiting for more. "Here I am," gagged Tom again. At this there came a voice from the gallery, "All right, Tom, we see that; get on with it." This familiarity was too much for Mead, who, rising from his stool, put it under his arm and with great dignity walked off the stage.

When memory fails in this distressing manner, it often happens that the chance remark which may be hazarded runs counter to the intentions of the author. A young actor was once given a part in which he had only four words to say, "Hark, 'tis the pistol," but the pistol was not fired at rehearsals. When the night of the first performance came he was word-perfect, but when the pistol really went off, startled out of himself, he shouted, "Good Heavens, what's that?"

As an old actor came on the stage one night, he found that the words had slipped from his memory; there was accordingly nothing left for him to do but to gag. He therefore commenced, "For fifty years I have been an old wanton,"

but fortunately at this point he remembered the original lines and there was no necessity for any further disclosure of an apparently lurid past.

Another actor, playing the part of Catesby in *Richard III*, had a speech commencing, "My lord; 'tis I. The early village cock hath twice done salutation to the morn," but unfortunately when the time came for it to be delivered all he could remember was, "My lord; 'tis I. The early village cock," and at this point he stuck. "Why the devil don't you crow then?" put in Richard.

The same play is also responsible for a story of Barry Sullivan, who became very much annoyed with an actor who was continually missing his cues. At last he could stand it no longer, and turning on the defaulter, he said, "What is your cue to come on?" "Well," replied the other, "Mr. Macready always used to whisper to me, 'You blasted fool, come on.'"

When Sir Charles Wyndham once appeared in America, he should have said, "I am drunk with ecstasy and success," but after giving the first three words with emphasis, his memory forsook him and he could get no farther. He repeated them, but with the same result. Again

he tried, and once more getting no farther than "I am drunk," he rushed from the stage amidst yells of laughter from the audience.

When memory fails in this manner, the prompter comes into his own, and with him brings a crop of stories. One of the best of these is that of an actor who had to kill himself by taking poison, but, when it came to the point, found he had forgotten to put the phial in his pocket and accordingly signalled to the prompter to get it. That official was unable to find it, but, anxious to do the best he could, he seized a loaded pistol and fired it off, whereupon the actor, rising to a partial extent to the occasion, fell dead with the words, "Oh! I am poisoned."

The hero was pressing the heroine to answer some question about which she hesitated. "You don't reply," he should have said, but the words would not come. "You don't reply," shouted the prompter. Still the hero said nothing. "You don't reply," was shouted again. Stung to fury at being, as he thought, baited in this manner, the actor hissed back, "How the devil can I when I don't know what to say?"

One member of a company had got into diffi-

culties and could not get any assistance from a prompter who was in an oblivious mood. Edging to the wings, the actor whispered, "Give me the word." "What word do you want?" said the prompter. Losing his temper at this, the player stepped into the wings and gave the prompter a sharp smack across the face, whereupon the latter, book in hand, rushed out on the stage calling out, "All right, that's a summons for you in the morning."

Sometimes, however, in extremities of this description, help will come from others on the stage. Mr. J. Jupp tells a story of a leading baritone who was called upon suddenly to take a somewhat lengthy part; he had little time to get the lines and songs into his head, and consequently went on the stage in a very nervous condition, more especially as it was his first appearance before a London audience. In one part he had to sing a love song to his sweetheart (played by Edna May). He successfully got through the first verse, but during the symphony found he had forgotten the words of the second. He attempted to get the words from Edna May, but there was no time for her to answer, and without hesitation she took up the second verse and sang it for him herself.

In one case, however, the culprit succeeded very cleverly in throwing the blame on an innocent person. Playing one evening with another actor, George Graves had completely lost the thread of the dialogue, and as they were both on the O.P. side, he could obtain no assistance from the prompter. Realising, at length, that desperate remedies were necessary and that he could continue gagging no longer, Graves clapped his hand on to his brother actor's shoulder and led him across the stage towards the prompt corner, at the same time saying, to the great amusement of the audience, "Come along, my boy; you want to get a bit nearer the prompter."

Nervousness, when words are not entirely forgotten, sometimes makes the tongue indulge in strange vagaries, even to the point of committing Spoonerisms. One actor, in place of, "Behind the thicket there stands a swift horse," announced that, "Behind the swiffit there skands a thick korthe." And in place of, "Stand back, my Lord, and let the coffin pass," another brought out, "Stand back, my Lord, and let the parson cough."

It was, of course, an actress who gave the fairies' song in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, with



a rendering of the line, "You spotted snake with double tongue," as "You potted snake with ham and tongue," and later finished up with the line "Hence, you long-legg'd spinsters, hence." Charles Kemble also once electrified the house by rendering the lines, "Shall I lay perjury upon my soul?" as "Shall I lay surgery upon my Poll?"

A quaint lapse, which once placed Charles Wyndham in an awkward position, occurred when he was playing David Garrick. The actor who was playing Simon Ingot had got his ideas slightly mixed, and when it came to the part where he upbraided Garrick in the words, "Oh, Mr. Garrick, if only you were sober," he rendered them, "Oh, Mr. Wyndham, if only you were sober."

Lastly there is the type of lapse that illustrates to the full the old saying that to be a good liar one must have a good memory. Once, while playing at the Strand Theatre, Arthur Roberts arrived very late for the performance, and having been out with the "bhoys" was not in the best condition for going on the stage. Under the circumstances, he persuaded the manager to go on and say that he had had an accident and broken his arm, but rather than

disappoint his patrons he would come on and do the best that he could. Following this, Arthur came on with his arm in a sling and received a wonderfully sympathetic welcome. Going on with his part and warming to his work, it was not long before he forgot the sling and, much to the amusement of the audience, was soon vigorously waving the broken arm.



## IX

### GAGGING

THE principal offenders in the art of gagging, as might be expected, have come from the variety stage, but among a brilliant crowd Arthur Roberts, perhaps, stands supreme. With him, to gag came as natural as to breathe, and so usual a practice was it that it is said that on one occasion he was presented with a virgin piece of white paper and a bottle of champagne as his script for a new part at the Gaiety Theatre.

Undoubtedly his best effort was made on the occasion when he had been asked to assist at a charity matinée got up by W. S. Gilbert. The piece chosen for the representation was *Trial by Jury*, and Arthur found himself selected for the very minor part of one of the jurymen. To the ordinary person such a rôle would have suggested little scope for humour, but to Arthur it afforded limitless possibilities. The fun commenced with the rehearsals, when Roberts attempted to ask several more or less absurd

questions, but was at once sat upon by Gilbert, who, very rudely, and in his usual pompous sergeant-major manner, ordered the comedian to sit down, following it up with the order that there was to be no gagging. When the actual performance came on, however, Roberts came into his own. When the jury filed into the box, he took care to be the last to enter, and once inside commenced to remove his boots—a specially old pair chosen for the occasion—and put them outside the box. His next act was to pull out a piece of chalk and to write on the outside of the box, “Call me at seven.” Following this, he opened a black bag, took out some whelks, and, extracting the contents with a pin, commenced to eat them. This little meal concluded, he took a plate and a small stick and started tootling the plate in the manner of a juggler. At this point a stage hand, evidently acting under orders, came to the wings and beckoned the comedian off the stage, but, taking no notice, Roberts brought out a small mug from his bag, and, after placing it on the edge of the box, took a coin from his pocket and spun it in the air. Then with the remark, “Heads I lose,” he picked up his bag and mug and ambled off as if about to fetch the supper

beer, leaving the audience almost in hysterics.

Dan Leno was also an inveterate gagger of the identical type, though very often his gagging consisted only of facial contortion, in itself sufficient to send his audience into paroxysms of laughter. His first entry in an old-fashioned melodrama, playing at a music-hall in the north of England, was from under the table of a sitting-room in an Italian inn, where, concealed by the long table-cloth, he was supposed to hear the vile plot hatched by the brigands. His cue was at a certain point to raise the cloth and peep out, so that the audience might realise his presence and the part that he would play in the dénouement. Dan carried out his instructions to the letter, raised the cloth at the precise moment and peered out on the spellbound audience, but from that moment there was no more plot nor play. At the sight of Dan's face the whole audience shrieked with laughter and the melodrama became a rollicking farce.

Another very amusing example, worthy of Arthur Roberts, occurred at the old Grecian Theatre when Arthur and Fred Williams were playing the parts of the First and Second Gravediggers in *Hamlet* respectively. Fred was well known to be an incorrigible gagger,

but, on this occasion, much to his brother's relief, he went through the whole scene without attempting to insert an extra word. Finally it came to the part where Fred had to go out to fetch a stoup of liquor, leaving Arthur to dig and sing, but, to his horror, hardly had he commenced when the incorrigible Fred returned with the remark, "They won't let me have the liquor unless I leave thrippence on the can." The roars of the audience quickly and definitely stopped Arthur's further performance.

Many of the old-time travelling companies put on plays when the actors had only a very rudimentary idea of the text; the result was that two-thirds of the play was gagging. Sydney Paxton tells how once in his early days he joined up with a booth at Rugeley, owned by an individual who, though he called himself Signor Ortini, possessed a Lancashire dialect thick enough to cut coal at Cannock. One day, playing a Shakespearian part, and gagging all through it, this individual astonished the house with this Shakespearian statement, "I says no more than I means a-doing." This same company once played *Maria Martin* without even seeing a book of the play, but they certainly achieved undying fame when old Martin ad-

dressed William Corder in the following terms :  
 " William, I know you seduced my daughter,  
 but I believe you did it all for the best."

Such impromptu interpolation has one merit in that it often produces some witticism which, with advantage, can be incorporated into the play. A good instance of this occurred during the run of *The Sultan of Mocha*. At one entry the Lord Chamberlain, slightly intoxicated, stumbles and falls. " Hello, my Lord," remarks the Sultan; " you've fallen down." " Yes," replies the prostrate one, " not-with-standing." Then, with a flash of genius the actor playing the Sultan once gagged, " Well, it isn't the first time the Lord Chamberlain has been *down* on the stage," and the gag proved so successful that it was given a permanent place in the play.

Either forgetfulness of lines or the omission or failure of some stage " prop " is responsible for the usual gag. In a play where the villain should have been given a phial of poison by the heroine in order that he might cheat the gallows, she unfortunately forgot to hand over the phial, with the result that the villain had to find some other means of making his exit from the world. This he managed by advancing to the front of the stage and declaiming, " And so to-

night I die. Yet never shall it be said that the last of my race fell by the hand of the public executioner. Never. Never. Never." Then, with a convulsive twitch of his head and a raising of his hands, he continued, "Ah, thank Heaven I have broken my neck," and forthwith fell dead upon the stage.

It was once Dan Leno's duty to walk, as a sentry, on one side of a prison wall, while on the other, the prisoner, in full view of the audience, was sawing through the bars of his cell with a file. The sentry was then to rush on and shoot the prisoner, who then fell back into his cell and expired in the limelight, while Dan knelt at his side and, gazing into his face, exclaimed in heart-broken accents, "Merciful Heavens, I have shot my own brother." (Curtain.) Unfortunately, however, the gun would not go off, and after Dan had made about half a dozen ineffectual attempts to fire, the convict, who had no intention of dropping the best part of his piece, staggered down to the centre of the stage and there expired in some unaccountable manner. Dan realised that under these conditions his original speech would be a little out of place, and so followed, and knelt beside the lifeless body and exclaimed in a voice



vibrating with sorrow and grief, "Merciful Heavens, he has swallowed the file! "

Another stage sentry was to shoot the prisoner as he escaped over the battlements. Again the gun failed to go off, but the escaping one, rising to the occasion, tumbled from the battlements with a heart-rending cry of, "Shot, shot, and by an accident! "

J. H. Barnes was once playing in *The World* at Cheyenne (U.S.A.); at the end of the third act, three starving men on a raft in the open sea are seen endeavouring to signal to a vessel on the horizon. At this moment the curtain broke and came down entire behind them, leaving no horizon, and the three distressed mariners had no option but to swim or walk through the ocean in full view of the audience. Barnes's conclusion was that the best thing to do was to get out of the difficulty by turning it into a laugh, and so shouted to his fellow-voyagers, "There's nothing left for it, boys, but to swim, and Heaven give us strength to reach the prompt entrance." Whereupon the three plunged into the seething billows (?) and walked to the wings amidst the shouts of laughter of the audience.

A few years ago Courtice Pounds and James

Welch appeared together at the Lyceum in a production of a Christmas play called *The Snow Man*. Snow which should have fallen failed to materialise. But Courtice Pounds saved the situation by exclaiming, "Let us go into the inn and procure a stoup of wine," on which the two left the stage and did not return till the expected snow-storm had begun.

There are occasions when the interpolation of matter not to be found in the text is not only permissible but even commendable, and one of these is when it is necessary to cover the late arrival of some actor on the stage. One night, during the run of *The Little Michus*, the call-boy failed to give George Graves his cue, and consequently he was a minute or two late in coming on the stage. On his arrival he was greeted by Bob Evett, who was holding the fort, with the remark, "Ah, General, you're late. We've all been waiting for you." Graves at once plunged into his usual patter, but discovered that for once his jokes failed to draw a laugh. Finally, when several had gone flat, he tried for what had previously always been a sure laugh. Again there was silence. All this time Bob had been watching him cheerfully, and at this point he came forward with the

assurance, "I told them all that while we were waiting for you."

Although not strictly to be described as gagging, mention might here be made of some of the remarks sometimes made *sotto voce* by even prominent actors while on the stage. Irving was among those who have been guilty in this respect and once, when playing *Othello* at Manchester on a Saturday night, he was on the stage with a well-known actress whom he knew to be coming to the usual Saturday-night supper held on the stage at the conclusion of the performance. They had arrived at what is perhaps the most impressive moment of the play, where Othello gazes at the corpse of Desdemona and then turns to the audience with a gesture of utter despair. It may have been on this particular evening Irving was exceptionally hungry, for as he gazed on the lovely corpse he whispered, "What's for supper tonight, Desdemona?" The question was too much for the corpse, and she burst into a fit of laughter.

Actors have generally been more notable for taking liberties with their audiences than actresses, but Clara Morris, an actress endowed with exceptional emotional powers, proved an

exception to this rule. Miss Geneviève Ward tells how she once saw her in a death scene, "leaning on her cushion surrounded by sorrowing relatives and with a whole audience crying in front, while behind her handkerchief she was making comic remarks to the surrounding actors." On another occasion, in a performance of *East Lynne*, "she sat at table with the children in the well-known pathetic scene when she suddenly discovered she was wearing the wrong shoes. She left the table and went to the door at the back, called for her shoes, and, holding on by the curtain, changed them and returned to her seat, the audience taking it all as part of the business and weeping through it from first to last."

Edward Wright, who, in his leisure time, farmed in a small way outside London, was playing at the Adelphi when a countryman called to see him with regard to a deal in pigs and was admitted behind the scenes. The bargaining was carried on in the wings without the two being able to come to an agreement, and it was not until Wright was once more on the stage that he accepted the dealer's offer, the acceptance being made in an aside while he was speaking his part.

It is not often that an actor takes advantage of gagging to give an opinion of the audience, but this was once brought off by Barry Sullivan when he was playing at Birmingham before a very poor and unappreciative audience. It was his duty to present the heroine to the leading juvenile, and enlarging the part, this is how he did it. "Take her-r, my boy. Take her-r, and with her-r-r take the blasted Birmingham audience into the bargain."

Another actor, whose benefit night was very thinly attended, got back on his audience by revising the passage, "'Tis not in mortals to command success, but we'll do more, Sempronius, we'll deserve it." He looked meaningly at the empty seats before delivering the lines which came, "We'll do more, Sempronius, we'll do without it."

The greatest liberty ever taken with an audience was surely that of George Frederick Cooke. He once appeared at Liverpool when he was obviously under the influence of drink, and to mark their resentment the house began to hiss. At the sound of this Cooke turned. "What, you hiss me!" he shouted. "Hiss George Frederick Cooke, you contemptible

money-getters. You shall never again have the honour of hissing me. Farewell, I banish you. There is not a brick in your dirty town which is not cemented with the blood of a negro! ”

The indignation of authors at the way comedians build up their parts, and insert gags as time goes on, seems to be a grouse as old as the theatre itself, as witness Hamlet's advice to the players, “ And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them ; for there be of them, that will themselves laugh, to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too ; though, in the meantime, some necessary question of the play be then to be considered ; that's villainous, and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it.”

## X

## WHEN THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS

A LARGE proportion of the awkward incidents that happen on the failure of stage mechanism or stage accessories centre round the plays of Shakespeare, and especially that of *Hamlet*.

The great actor Macready during the rehearsals at a country theatre had occasion to find fault fairly frequently with a local actor who took the part of the King. The man was indignant at this constant criticism and apparently decided on revenge, for, on the first night of the production, instead of remaining at the back of the stage when stabbed by Hamlet, he reeled to the centre and fell dead on the very spot that Macready had reserved for himself before he expired in Horatio's arms. "Die further up the stage. What are you doing here? Get up and die elsewhere, sir," said the star under his breath. At this, to the amazement of the audience, the dead King sat up, and in a voice that could be heard all over the house said, "Look here, Mr. Macready, you've

had your way at the rehearsals ; but I'm King now, and I shall die just where I please."

Lady Benson once took the part of Ophelia. For the burial it was arranged that she should be lifted from the bier and placed in the unseen arms of the stage hands waiting under the trap which formed the grave. One night a new set of supers were told off for this duty, but were unaware that their burden was a living woman. The consequence was that when Ophelia's handmaidens lifted her from the bier to the words, "Lay her in the earth," the expectant arms were not there to receive the corpse. There was a hurried and whispered appeal, the girls could not sustain the weight any longer, when there came a voice from below, "Stuff the d—d thing through the hole, you fools." On future occasions a dummy was used.

For an unrehearsed Shakespearian effect it would be difficult to beat the story told by Admiral Mark Kerr to the effect that, whilst at Malta, a bluejacket got up a theatrical company among his shipmates and decided on *Richard III*, the promoter to play the King. The show did not go off very well till almost the end, when an unrehearsed incident set the audience



rocking with laughter. King Richard was standing on the stage receiving messengers in front of the palace when, out of breath, Catesby walked in, and, mixing up two occasions and different lines, said "We've captured Buckingham, my lord, and cut 'is 'ead off." "You 'ave, 'ave you?" said King Richard, planting his fist in Catesby's jaw and knocking him down. "Then you've spoilt the 'ole bloomin' play!"

On at least one occasion the junior arm of the service interpreted a play in a manner unintended by the author. It was at one time a provincial practice, when a military play was produced, to obtain the supers from any regiment that might be stationed in the neighbourhood. In one case these were drawn from an Irish regiment, and the opening performance was billed as a Grand Military Night at which the colonel and all the officers were to be present. In the play, the army, composed of soldiers, had to retire before the attacks of the infuriated populace. When the evening arrived, however, the army refused to retire, the sham battle resolved itself into a real one, weapons were thrown down, and both sides fought with their fists until the curtain had to be rung down on the contestants. Interrogated

later as to his conduct, the sergeant in charge retorted, "Is it retrate you'd have us' with the colonel in front? Devil a bit!"

How easily even a simple action may give a result totally different from what the producer or actor intended is shown in a story told by Owen Nares, who, when at school at Reading, appeared on Speech Day as the First Lord in *As You Like It*. In the course of his part he had to give the line, "Sweep on, you fat and greasy citizens." In enunciating this bit, he, for the first time, put in a gesture embracing all the people sitting round the platform, and then realised to his horror that he had thus characterised the worthy Mayor and Corporation of Reading.

A straining after realism has on more than one occasion brought about some queer results on the stage. Miss Geneviève Ward once appeared with a tenor whose stature was as small as his voice was large. In the last act of the play she had to rush into his arms, a thing which she did with such energy that he toppled over and she followed on the top of him.

At a Stratford-on-Avon Festival, the actress taking the part of Imogen who, of course, has to throw herself on the headless body of Cloten,

did it so thoroughly that she came down with her full weight on the dead man's abdomen, whereupon, to the delight of the audience, the corpse let out an audible groan, drew up its legs and then shot them out again.

Realism was again carried too far when Terriss and Marion Terry were playing husband and wife, in a play during which he tells her that she is not his wife, whereupon she pushes him away with the word, "Devil!" "I think you miss one great effect," said Terriss once to Marion, "when you say Devil, you ought to bang me in the face. It would be much more effective." It was. When the next time came for Miss Marion to play the part, she struck out so vigorously that for the rest of the scene Terriss had to hold a handkerchief to his nose.

Sometimes such realism may be brought about by factors unappreciated by the audience. Two actors were violently quarrelling in the wings when they received their call to go on the stage. Here they had to fight a duel, and it was noticed that this particular evening they carried it on with unusual earnestness. At length one of the swords broke off at the hilt, but the owner of it promptly framed up with

his fists, broke down the other man's guard, and with a well-directed left hook put him out of action for the night at least.

Whimsical Walker was a victim of excessive enthusiasm when playing once in pantomime. He was carrying out the usual foolery with the comic policeman when that officer banged him on the back so hard as to cause his false teeth to fly out, and, rolling over the footlights into the orchestra, the dentures finished their career by hitting a fiddler in the eye.

Accuracy carried to an extreme would appear to have been a fault of J. H. Batson, an Australian actor, who was once starring in the West Indies when his performance was such as to rouse a company of dark-coloured gentlemen to give a performance on their own account. They chose the tragedy of *Othello* and approached Batson to play the lead. "Certainly," replied the actor; "but as all the other characters are dark coloured, I ought to play the Moor in my own white face." And he did.

Unexpected incidents often follow when a member of the caste indulges in some witticism or joke, often by way of gagging, and makes

it difficult for those on the stage to keep straight faces. In a representation of *Rupert of Hentzau*, where, in a solemn moment in the last scene, Rupert lies dead upon a catafalque with his feet towards the footlights, while the Queen and the ladies of the court mourn around him, the sounds of sobbing were interspersed with tittering, not only from the stage but from the audience. Only too clearly, the dead man's boots bore the mark 3/11, made in chalk by a brother actor in the dressing-room.

Those two humorists Corney Grain and à Beckett once provided an example of the unexpected. By some means or other they got themselves put down as supers in a play produced at St. George's Hall, their principal job being to play a game of écarté on the stage. "All you have to do," said the author who was producing, "is to cut the cards and deal them out. If you can make it appear to the audience that you are taking an interest in the game, so much the better; but remember, no talking." On the eventful evening the two sat down to the game, and it would appear that à Beckett lost, since he quietly emptied the contents of his purse on the table. At the end of the next game his watch, rings, and necktie

followed. Then he took off his coat and lost that. His waistcoat and boots followed, after which he buried his head in his hands and wept bitterly. The audience, who had thoroughly enjoyed this bit of fooling, were loud in their applause. The author, however, was furious and accused the two of spoiling his play. "Well," said Corney Grain, "we only took care that the audience should see that we were deeply interested in the game, deeply interested."

Arthur Roberts was, on one occasion, arrested for the theft of a pair of slippers from an hotel at Stroud, which slippers his valet had accidentally packed up when leaving the town. The prosecution was held to be an attempt by the landlord to get his revenge on Roberts for protesting against overcharges in his bill. Needless to say, the comedian was acquitted, but when, on the evening of the trial, he reappeared on the stage of the Empire, the orchestra struck up, "Oh, dem golden slippers," while the audience joined whole-heartedly in the chorus.

A young Hussar officer, who strolled one night into one of the old-fashioned London music-halls, was invited to take a seat of

honour at the chairman's table. After he had ordered the necessary refreshment for the chairman and himself, the former asked if he was in the profession. "Yes," was the reply, "I am a conjurer. I work under the name of Professor Vesuvio." "Care to give a show?" asked the chairman. "I don't mind," said the Professor. "All I require is a small table." Introduced as Signor Vesuvio, the wizard of the world, the Professor informed the audience that he proposed to give them an exhibition of prestidigitation upon an entirely new principle, and for his purpose he wanted a silk hat, a pocket knife, and a lady's shawl. When these had been obtained, he cut the brim off the hat, covered it with the shawl, and then announced that if someone with a watch would time him he would leave the stage for a while and "in two minutes you will see what you shall see." The orchestra struck up, the professor stepped lightly to the stage door, called a hansom, and drove off to supper.

But perhaps the greatest burst of laughter which a theatre has ever witnessed occurred in a scene in which the famous Mrs. Siddons figured. Playing on a warm summer night, she became very thirsty and asked her dresser

to get her something to drink. The dresser, assuming that the actress's taste would be the same as her own, sent a boy out to a neighbouring public-house for a pint of beer. On his return, the boy asked for Mrs. Siddons and was told that she was on the stage. Without more ado, the youngster walked on, just as the actress was going through the sleeping scene in *Macbeth*, and advancing to her in full view of the whole house presented the tankard with the words, "If you please, ma'am, I've brought your beer."



## XI

### REPLY, REJOINDER, AND REPARTEE

IN no other professions has wit been so prolific or reached so high a standard as in that of the theatre, and many of the stories current to-day, that in the course of years have become ascribed to notabilities in other ranks of life, really owe their birth to the stage.

Prominent among the contributors, if not indeed entitled to first place, is W. S. Gilbert, of Gilbert and Sullivan fame, and though many of his best efforts are so much common property as to have become "chestnuts," yet they are usually so good as to bear their repetition. What could have been more cutting than his remark to another person on an actor who had once offended him? "My dear fellow, you are quite wrong in thinking I am upset with him. Nobody likes him better than I do, and I detest him."

Gilbert, unfortunately for himself, was not a man who suffered fools gladly, and when he came into contact with them, it usually had the

effect of bringing out all the spleen in his nature. Once, asked by a specimen of the cheerful idiot if a certain composer, who had been dead many years, was still composing, the enquirer got the unexpected answer, "No, he's decomposing."

A story of Gilbert which has been seized upon and told of various notabilities concerns the time when he had as neighbour at his house in the country a famous jam and pickle maker who was causing some local amusement by his attempts to pass as a country gentleman. Unfortunately, Gilbert's dogs had been guilty of trespassing on this gentleman's grounds, and, writing somewhat rudely to complain of the intrusion, the jam-maker received the following reply. "Dear Sir, I will take care that in future my dogs do not trespass on your preserves. Kindly pardon the expression."

The relationship between Gilbert as a producer and the actors taking part in his productions were not always of the most amicable description, and rehearsals often finished with everyone concerned being thoroughly out of temper. Free, however, for once, from malice was Gilbert's reply to a theatre fireman of whom, when rehearsing one day and anxious

to find a certain actress, he asked where she was. "Oh," replied the man in an off-hand manner, "she's round behind." "Yes, I know that," said Gilbert, "but where is she?"

Charles Brookfield was also possessed of a keen and biting wit, and it was said of him that he could administer the perfect snub more completely than any man of his time. He was lunching one day with Sidney Dark at the Cavour, in Leicester Square, when an offensively friendly person came up, slapped Brookfield on the back, and at the same time said, "How are you, Charlie?" Looking up, the actor quietly said, "If I knew your name, sir, I would be equally familiar."

One peculiarity of Brookfield was that he was very much down on any attempt to "swank." Grossmith had, prior to going to the Savoy, achieved only very modest success as an entertainer, but with the popularity of the Gilbert and Sullivan productions he made rapid strides and soon amassed a considerable fortune. Unfortunately, at times, he could not help boasting a little of this, a habit not at all pleasing to a man like Brookfield, who never could keep money, and which, one day in a club where many actors were assembled,

brought forth the protest, "But, George, we don't all look so damned funny in evening dress."

Brookfield was at lunch with a party of brother actors in the Mutton Chop Club, when their laughter and high spirits were apparently obnoxious to a certain painter, who was feeling very sore at the moment owing to a rejection of a picture of his by the Academy. At last, thoroughly aroused by the noisy merriment of the actors, the painter turned round in his chair and addressing Brookfield said, "I wish, Brookfield, you actors would shut up; we can hear you any evening for sixpence." "Really," said Brookfield in the silky tone that he always used when he was going to strike deeply; "I tried to see you at the Academy to-day for a shilling, but I couldn't."

Although, in reality, a most kindly man, Brookfield's wit was always caustic. He was talking to another theatrical celebrity one day when the latter noticed that Brookfield was looking hard at him. "What's up?" he asked at length. "Is my tie wrong?" "No," was the reply, "but you have a little 'dried soap in your right ear." "How filthy!" said the celebrity. "Oh, no," said the actor, "not filthy

at all ; a little ostentatious perhaps ! ”

One Sunday evening he was walking down Pall Mall with Hawtree, both grumbling at everywhere being closed. “ I tell you what,” said Brookfield at last. “ Let’s go into the Carlton and hear the Jews eating their soup.”

Another actor whose most clever sayings are classic was H. J. Byron, who was one day discussing the misfortunes of a well-known actor, whose experiences with the broker’s men had been numerous and varied. “ I hear,” said one of the company, “ that they’ve taken his piano again. A Broadwood, wasn’t it ? ” “ No,” replied Byron without a smile ; “ it was a Collard and Collard.”

“ You haven’t been acting lately,” said another actor to him one day. “ No,” came the reply ; “ neither has my liver.”

At one time in his career Byron took up theatre management and ran three theatres in Liverpool with but indifferent success. A friend, on meeting him one day in London, looking very worried, sympathetically asked, “ What’s the matter, old fellow—liver ? ” “ No,” replied Byron lugubriously ; “ Liverpool.”

Tree's ready wit is also famous: it was Tree who was once discussing nationalities with a boastful American. "Yep," said the Yank, "it's get out or get under with us or, as you Britishers say, it's deeds, not words, that count." "My friend," said Tree in his grand manner, "have you ever sent a telegram?"

During the run of *Julius Cæsar* at His Majesty's, Tree insisted that the body of Julius Cæsar should remain on the stage during Anthony's long speech and should not be replaced by a dummy. The actor, Charles Fulton, who was taking this part, protested. "I often have a cold in my head," he complained, "and what will the audience say if the corpse sneezes?" "Oh," replied Tree, "they will only call you Julius Cnæsar."

A former star wrote to Tree stating that she intended returning to the stage, and she would be obliged if he would find something for her. "Anything will do," wrote the lady, "from Lady Macbeth down to the Cloak-room." To this Tree replied, "Dear Mrs. X. We have one Lady Macbeth in the theatre already. She is in the Cloak-room."

Cruelty crept in when Tree retorted to a

dramatist he had met walking down Piccadilly. Tree had produced some of the dramatist's plays, but with no great measure of success, and, observing the man to be looking somewhat downcast, he enquired what was the matter. "Matter," said the other. "A really terrible accident. I had just finished a new play for you and left it in my study. During my absence my little grandson came in, took it up, and threw it on the fire, and I have no other copy." "Why, I didn't know he could read," said Tree.

*The Eternal City* was written for Tree by Hall Caine, and at one rehearsal the author suggested that, to make the play more realistic, Tree should, at one moment, 'drag the heroine Roma around by the hair and bash her head on the stage. "But, my dear Caine," objected Tree, "I seem to remember a somewhat similar incident being worked into another famous tragedy." "Good gracious!" exclaimed Hall Caine, terrified at the idea that he might be guilty of literary piracy; "what play was that?" "It was," said Tree very slowly and solemnly—"yes, it was called *Punch and Judy*."

At another time he received between the acts

a lady who had sent in her card and asked to see him. At first Tree failed to recognise her until she recalled incidents known to both of them. "Ah," he said at length, "you must pardon me, but I did not recognise you in my make-up."

There was at least one occasion, however, on which Tree met his Waterloo. Walking one day down the Haymarket, he was accosted by a perfect stranger, who, with a low bow said, "Pardon me, but are you Beerbohm Tree, the actor?" "No, certainly not," said Sir Herbert, who had a suspicion that his questioner was one of the "touching" brigade. "I'm very sorry," said the stranger, "but I thought you were. You look so much like the pictures I have seen of him." "No," said Tree, "I am not that person." "Well," continued his questioner, "I must apologise. I didn't mean to insult you, but I thought you looked like him."

Some members of the theatrical profession, in tending to emphasise their successes and to forget their sometimes humble beginnings, invite the wit to exercise his talent, of which chance some clever members of the profession have not been slow in availing themselves. Bob Palmer, a one-time famous comedian, had been in his



early days a bill-sticker, a fact which he liked to forget. As he came one evening into the green room at the theatre in which he was appearing, dressed in elaborate style as Sir Brilliant Fashion, someone commented on the sparkling buckles on his shoes and the diamond on his finger and enquired if they were real. "To be sure they are," was the reply; "I wear nothing but diamonds." "Indeed," said another famous actor, Jack Bannister, "I remember when you wore nothing but paste." The remark was strongly resented by Palmer, but his expostulations were drowned in a roar of laughter when someone else put in, "Why don't you stick him against the wall, Bob?"

An equal tendency of some actors, especially those of the younger generation, is to enlarge upon their rôles or on their drawing powers usually, and here again the wit has his opening. Over a drink, two actors were discussing their triumphs. "Matter of fact, old fellow," said one, "I have never been properly appreciated here. Do you know that when I played Bulldog Drummond on my last colonial tour, the audience at one place took twenty minutes to leave the theatre." "Ah," said the

other one, "I expect the poor devil was lame."

"Yes," boasted a young actor, "I've scored an absolute triumph. You ought to come along some time and see for yourself. Each night it's almost pathetic the way I move 'em." "I see," said a brother actor, "a sort of stampede, eh?"

Another young aspirant had been found a minor part in a play where each night he had to come on and utter the soul-stirring lines, "'Twas even so, my lord." After a few weeks of this he happened to come across Sir John Hare, with whom he had a slight acquaintance, and Sir John kindly asked how he was getting on. "Oh," said the rising Irving, "we are doing so well with our present show that we shall run it up to Christmas, after which we produce a fairy play for the children. Then comes our Shakespeare season, and after that we shall bring on a new play by a well-known author." "Ah, that is very interesting," said Sir John; "I'm glad things are going so well with you. By the way, is Tree still with you?"

Toole once received a well-merited snub for a similar tendency, when, at one time, he was playing at the Winter Gardens at Blackpool,

where the shilling entrance fee to the grounds also admitted to standing room at the play, with the result that there was a huge house. Taking advantage of this, Toole wired to several of his friends, "Playing to eight thousand to-night." This brought back from J. B. Howard, of the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh, the wire, "Where are you playing—on the sands?"

Such attempts on the part of the actor to emphasise his own value often provoke a managerial retort. A well-known manager once wired to Murray Carson, who had previously played with success in *A Royal Divorce*, and asked him on what terms he would take up his old part. The reply came, "Will gladly play Napoleon again. Terms £60 a week." To this the manager wired back, "Make it shillings and I'll send the contract."

In a similar case the manager of the Kennington Theatre, interviewing a comedian whom he wished to engage for his pantomime, asked how much a week he wanted. "Fifty pounds," was the reply. "You're funnier off the stage than you are on," retorted the manager.

The bore receives a short shift in the theatrical world. Irving was once in the Green Room Club when he was seized upon by an actor whom he had known in his earlier days, and who insisted on telling him a long and weary story of a meeting with a mutual acquaintance in Paris. "Yes," said the bore, "and do you know, Henry, he came up to me and said, 'Surely your name is Wilson?'" "And was it?" queried Irving sweetly.

The conflict that so often arises during rehearsals between the actors and producer provides its opportunities. Sidney Grundy, who adapted so many French plays for presentation on the English stage, was once very much annoyed at an actor, who, at a late rehearsal, was very imperfect in his lines. There was some recrimination between the two, until at length the actor turned. "Look here, Mr. Grundy," he said, "I should be obliged if you would keep your remarks to yourself. I know my words." "I dare say you do," said Grundy, "but you don't know mine."

Similarly, when Charles Frohman was once taking a rehearsal, he suggested to the leading lady that she should make certain movements. The suggestion, however, did not commend

itself to the lady, who, turning on the producer, said acidly, "You seem to forget that I am an actress." "Madame," came the immediate reply, "I will keep your secret."

Direct and hard hitting was the reproof which once came from the famous actor Barrymore. One night the actor was in the Press Club at Philadelphia when a young Englishman present, who had taken too much drink, began to run down everything American. "Why, hang it, Barry," said the youngster, "they can't even spell in this country. They spell honour h-o-n-o-r and labour l-a-b-o-r." Like a flash came Barrymore's retort, "Yes, old man, but when they are talking about labour and honour, they leave you out of the question."

Another actor, who once administered a well-earned reproof in a case of gross rudeness, was Penley. He had stepped into a carriage in the northern express at Euston to find it occupied by two individuals who had filled up the corners opposite to them with luggage, thus occupying all four corner seats. Seeing this Penley said nothing, but continued standing up. After some time one of them began, somewhat shamefacedly, to clear one of the corners.

"Please don't disturb yourselves," said Penley ;  
 "I'm getting out at Glasgow."

The reproof, however, does not always come from the theatrical personage ; Henry Irving was once told off by a humble cabby. He one day drove to the Lyceum, and in a fit of absentmindedness on arriving there gave the cabman a shilling, the legal fare being about two. Looking at the coin, the cabby, who had recognised Sir Henry, said, "Well, if you plays the Jew inside that theyater as well as you does outside, darned if I won't spend this bob in coming to see yer."

The old-time actors excelled in caustic criticism. A short duel once took place between Fawcett, the comedian, and George Frederick Cooke, the tragedian. "How are you this morning?" asked the former on one occasion. "Not at all myself," replied Cooke. "Then I congratulate you," said Fawcett, "for be anyone else you may, you will be a gainer by the bargain."

"Why do you always sing the same song?" asked Foote once of a man whose voice was certainly capable of improvement. "Because it haunts me," was the reply. "I don't wonder at that," said Foote, "seeing that you are

constantly murdering it."

A gentleman who had recently returned from Australia remarked to John Kemble that the theatre at Sydney, which was run by Australian talent, seemed to be in a very flourishing condition. "Yes," replied Kemble, "the performers ought to be all good, for they have been selected and sent to that situation by very excellent judges."

Compton, another old-time actor, had a great horror of stage amateurs. He was once approached by one of this fraternity, who stated that he was anxious to become a professional. "I've got splendid notices," he said, "and all my friends think that if I went on the stage professionally, I should make a big hit." "What line do you take?" asked Compton. "Well, I play all the funny parts, but somehow I don't make the audience laugh as heartily as I could wish. I want to make the house ring with laughter." "In that case," said Compton, "I should advise you to change your line a bit and play Hamlet."

Another stage personality whose remarks were always witty but bitter was Henry Hamilton. Entering the Green Room Club one night, he saw Charles Wyndham, whose beautiful

performance of Garrick at the Criterion was at that time delighting London, sitting in the famous chair, once the property of the celebrated David. "Ah," said Hamilton as he noticed Wyndham, "more like Garrick every day—and less like him every night."

Characteristic of the profession is that, as at the Bar, its members always appear able to say the right thing at the right moment. When someone asked Charles Mathews, one of England's greatest actors, what he was going to do with his son (who, by the way, was destined for architecture), "Oh," said the actor at once, "he is going to draw houses, like his father."

Quinn, the friend of Garrick, was once lamenting that he was growing old, whereupon a young blood asked him what he would give to be as young as the questioner. "I would be content," said Quinn, "to be as foolish."

A gentleman called to see the famous actor Suett at the theatre at which he was playing. Suett was out at the moment, but shortly after came in drenched with rain. "Pardon me, sir," said the visitor, "but are you Suett?" "Egad," was the reply, "I rather think I'm dripping."

This gift seems to have descended in full



measure to his brother or sister of modern days. Mrs. Kendall and Ellen Terry, playing once in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, achieved great success and at the conclusion of the play there were loud shouts for them to come before the curtain. "They want the stars," said one actor to the two ladies. "Ancient lights methinks would be more appropriate," answered Mrs. Kendall.

Another actress who got in a delightful reply, though not under the easiest of circumstances, was Lady Bancroft. There was a rumour abroad that she had refused to play in a forthcoming production at the Haymarket, and, on landing at Dover, after a particularly rough Channel crossing, she was approached by an interviewer, who, not very diplomatically, enquired if she had thrown up her part. "No, sir," was the reply, "but I certainly should have done so had I swallowed it."

Another score to a lady was achieved by Mrs. Pat Campbell. During the run of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, George Alexander got the idea that Mrs. Pat was laughing at him and accordingly sent her a message to the effect that he would be much obliged if she would not laugh at him on the stage. The reply came

back, "Mrs. Campbell's compliments to Mr. Alexander, but she always waits till she gets home."

Seymour Hicks is, of course, famous for his witty conversation. He was talking one day with another actor and they were discussing a mutual friend whose wife had just left him, in consequence of his unstable temper. "She has been his mainstay so long," said the actor, "that if she leaves him in the lurch he'll probably blow his brains out." "Shoot himself, you mean," corrected Seymour.

Arthur Roberts also got in the right word at the right moment when, on the stage at Glasgow, a small cottage, which formed part of the scenery, got on fire. It was really only a strip of painted canvas, and the stage hands soon pulled it down. Before the audience had time to get alarmed, Roberts stepped to the footlights and said, "Thanks to you, ladies and gentlemen, whenever I come to Glasgow, I pull the house down."

At one time the West End of London was haunted by a man dressed in the garb of a clergyman, who made a practice of whispering in people's ears such comforting remarks as, "Are you saved?" "Hell is waiting for

you! ” “ Are you prepared to perish everlastingly? ” One night he slid up quietly by Sir Henry Irving’s side as he walked along the street and whispered in his ear, “ Have you found the Lord? ” “ No,” said Irving. “ Have you lost him, because if you have, I shall be delighted to join you in the search? ”

## XII

### THE FRONT ROW

*Gone away are the Gaiety girls,  
With their powdered noses and tricked-up curls;  
Gone away are these sirens smart,  
Fertile of kisses, but barren of heart—  
Blowing alternately cold and hot,  
Steadfastly sticking to all they've got—  
Filling a bevy of hot-brained boys  
With maddening hopes of untasted joys.*

THE chorus girl of to-day is very different from her sister of the nineties. The old-time show-girl, so long a popular feature of the Gaiety and Daly's theatres, has given way to a hard-working young woman, full of ambition and a desire to make her way in the profession. No longer is the chorus looked upon as the half-way house to the Peerage or a rich marriage, but rather as a step towards public acknowledgment of her powers as an actress.

The chorus girl of the past was not expected to act, it was sufficient if she stood around

and looked beautiful—and sometimes rather wooden. To have attained that position was the height of her ambition and all-sufficing. “The show-girl,” so characteristic of all the George Edwardes’s productions, was very largely the consequence of the Victorian idea that beauty flourished in abundance in the ranks of the chorus, an idea that the management were wise enough to foster, and in pursuance of it these ladies were produced in a very riot of colour and finery. No expense was spared, and perfection of dress was sought down to even the finest detail. The result of this was that girls of every rank flocked to join the Edwardian army. Attracted by love of dress, or the possibility of a wealthy marriage, girls of all classes aspired to become one of the chorus, until it came to be one of the most cosmopolitan communities that the theatre world has ever seen. High born and low born, East End, West End and suburban, accomplished and illiterate, all were to be found in its ranks, drawn together by the glorious possibilities of a life of admiration culminating in a St. George’s, Hanover Square, marriage. Even at a very early age, this “show-girl” was recognised as a factor of the Gaiety by Holings-

head, who once had the following notice affixed to the stage door. "Ladies drawing less than twenty-five shillings a week are politely requested not to arrive at the theatre in broughams."

The chorus girl of to-day, however, is essentially a product of the post-war period. Faced with the ever-growing competition of the wireless and the films, she is compelled in the struggle to keep her place to put her whole heart into the work, with the result that she is self-reliant, healthy, and efficient. The passport to success to-day is not beauty, but hard work and ability. Compared with the chorus girl of twenty or thirty years ago, she is as the bee to the butterfly.

It has remained, however, for George Graves to record a little-known characteristic of the modern chorus girl. "Chorus girls," he says, "have been written up and written down, romanced about and maligned. They have been held up to contumely as gold-diggers and social climbers. They are alleged to be despoilers of the social hearth, grafters after motor-cars, and nibblers at the forbidden fruit. Well, of that I have little experience. But I do know that they have glorious, enviable and

utterly insatiable appetites. They are always hungry, and will devour anything from chocolate to cold tripe."

Coming very often from the lower ranks of society, with only a very limited general and social education, the chorus lady of the past, who, owing to her looks, found herself quickly an object of admiration, had a difficult path to tread in this strange and unknown world. At first she was not always able to appreciate things at their proper value. In one case a lady of this description had been presented by an admirer with a priceless set of silver sables. Some time later she was asked by a friend what she had been doing on the preceding day. "Oh," she replied, "those furs that Lord A gave me were full of grey hairs, so I spent the whole day picking them out." Seymour Hicks tells of another lady of the chorus who, some years ago, was with him at the Gaiety, and who had been given a string of very valuable pearls by a wealthy admirer. One night, unfortunately, the fastening broke, and the pearls were scattered all over the stage, whereupon the fair owner simply remarked, "Oh, I say, isn't it too bad? I've dropped all my beads."

Removed from her normal environment and

plunged into the world of society, the limitations of the chorus lady were sometimes only too apparent. One such lady, a very beautiful girl, though of her education the less said the better, one day found herself a guest at a swell function where she felt very much out of things. Left to herself, she was leaning against the oak-panelled wall and making a very charming picture. At that moment her hostess came along. "My dear," she said kindly, "you look just like an old Rembrandt." "Well," replied the fed-up girl, not realising the compliment, "I don't think you look too damn snappy yourself."

Another lady of the front rank had been invited to his country seat by an admirer, and on her return to the theatre she gave a full, true and correct account of her visit. She commenced with her reception. "Yes, my dear," she said, "I got into the park just as the hounds were coming along, and he was with them. He was so glad to see me. And he did look lovely! Would you believe it, there he was all dressed up in his red coat, and he jumped off his horse, took me in his arms, and told the huntsman to stop the fox for a minute. Wasn't it nice of him?"

Another lady, who certainly had not been



born in Mayfair, had by force of genius made her way to the front, but unfortunately her social and general education had not kept pace with her theatrical experience. She was lunching one day at a famous restaurant with a certain lordly landowner, who was enlarging on the distressful state of the country. "There will be no end of poverty this winter," he said; "the corn has been an utter failure in nearly every district." "Never mind, old bean," said the cheery girl, "there's still enough left in my right boot to stop a bally famine."

Another little lady was feeling very much off-colour. "Oh dear," she complained to the manager, "I've such a 'orrid 'eadache to-night. What do you think I ought to take?" "Try a couple of aspirates, my dear," was the unfeeling reply.

An ignorance of social customs and usages sometimes shows itself in their correspondence. One lady had been unwise enough to introduce her best boy to another pretty blonde in the same chorus, with the result that the fickle admirer changed his mind and transferred his affections. Learning of this, the deserted one wrote to her triumphant rival as follows: "You cat. Wait till I get my fingers on you, you

good-for-nothing bleached blonde. I'll scratch out your eyes, pull out your hair and your teeth, and throw acid on your ugly face. Yours truly, Miss B. P.S.—Please excuse pencil."

It was, perhaps, in her numerous love affairs that the chorus girl displayed her richest humour. One lady was boasting in the dressing-room of her latest conquest. "Yes," she said, "his lordship proposed to me last night, but I wasn't certain whether to accept him or not. After all, one wants to look round first a bit, you know." "My word," said her envious friend breathlessly, "and what did you say to him?" "Well," said the blonde, "I saw he was a bit too keen to take no for an answer, so I thought I could play him up a bit, and I said, 'No, Reggie, I'm afraid not, but don't let that discourage you. I may come to care for you in time. I had the same trouble myself with oysters.'"

Unfortunately, sometimes the attaché, though deeply in love, is not at the moment too well supplied with money. A very much love-stricken youth had turned up at the theatre with a very lovely bouquet. "Oh, it's too sweet of you," gushed the fair young girl. "And how beautifully fresh they are! Why, I believe

there is still a little dew on them." The youth blushed. "Yes, that's quite true," he stammered, "but I shall pay it off at the end of the month."

The average chorus girl appeared at one time either to marry into the ranks of nobility or wealth or, failing that, later in life, to swell the ranks of the dressers; but it would not seem that all the marriages turned out in a satisfactory manner. One lady had been married in a registry office to a youthful member of a noble family, and a week or two later the bride returned to the office. "Are you the man who issued this certificate of marriage between me and the Honourable Bertie Bogus?" she asked, flourishing the document in question. "Yes, I believe I am," said the registrar. "Well, what are you going to do about it?" said the lady furiously. "'E's escaped."

The chorus, recruited as it is from nearly all ranks of society, is essentially a place where any attempt at "swank" is quickly suppressed. A lady, not necessarily of the front rank, was boasting of her pedigree. "Well," said a rival, "your grandfather may have been a bloomin' emperor, but anyway, your mother sold coke to the man who ran away with my aunt." In-

deed, it would appear that humility is almost a necessity. Joan had decided to take up a stage career, and in due course obtained an engagement in a revue. "What character do you take?" asked a friend. "I don't have any character," was the reply; "I'm in the chorus."

The question of until what age a lady can remain in the chorus is one which has often been discussed, but it would seem that it must remain like  $x$ , the unknown quantity. One of the chorus, somewhat past her first bloom, was paying a call and found herself received by the small daughter of the house. In the course of the conversation the little one remarked that her Daddy said he had often seen Miss —— on the stage. "Indeed," said the delighted chorus lady; "what did he see me in?" "Oh," said the child frankly, "he said it was somewhere in the nineties."

The stage doorkeeper noticed a young man hanging about and evidently waiting for the exit of the artistes. Walking up to him, he asked for whom he was waiting. "Miss Flossie Footlights," returned the youth. "Look here, young man," said the doorkeeper, "she's got plenty of followers already and doesn't want any more; you take my advice and run away

home." "Followers," replied the young man in disgust, "why, she's my grandmother."

Judging from stories that have been, and are perhaps still, current, it seems that the old idea that the favours of the ladies of the stage, and especially the chorus, could be bought still persists in some quarters. Reginald Auberon tells how he once took an eccentric but generous-minded old gentleman to a minor theatrical club, much frequented by actresses of the lower ranks and members of the chorus. As the visit took place at Christmas time, the old gentleman was in a particularly benevolent mood, and the thought that some of the members of the club were out of a "shop" moved him to practical sympathy, so he walked round the room thrusting Treasury notes upon them. "It was kindly meant, of course," writes Mr. Auberon, "and quite sensibly received in this spirit. However, he made his gifts just a little embarrassing by loudly remarking to each fair recipient, 'Look here, my dear, this is simply a Christmas present for you. I don't want anything sexual in return.'"

Naturally, with so many inducements to spend their time in a much pleasanter manner, it is sometimes difficult for these ladies to fulfil

their business engagements, and when these are missed, some very amusing excuses are often put forward. "I remember," tells Seymour Hicks, "once saying to one ox-eyed beauty with peroxide hair, who had stayed away one evening without permission, and who, I knew, had gone to a dinner and the opera, 'May I ask what you meant by not being here last night?' Her gentle answer was, 'I'm very sorry, dear, but I had typhoid fever.'"

Things have greatly changed for the better since the time when chorus girls were paid one shilling a night, out of which they had to pay for their own shoes and stockings, but the low salaries of beginners may still occasion a grievance. A well-meaning padre was making enquiries into the conditions under which the girls worked. "But, good gracious!" he said, "it is surely almost impossible to lead a good Christian life on such a small sum?" "On the contrary," replied the fair one, "it's the only kind of life you can lead on thirty-five bob a week."

## XIII

### THE ASPIRANT

SIR FRANK BENSON quotes Mrs. Stirling as giving the following advice to theatrical aspirants. "You will never be an actor," said this queen of the stage, "until you have learnt to get through your part though the snow comes through the roof; with an audience consisting of only two or three drunks, who are not listening; while the sparrows twitter and flutter round the auditorium before settling to roost in the flies; while rats trot across the foot-lights carrying off your pet powder-puff in their mouths. You have got to learn to act though none of the company except yourself are sober; when no one gives you your proper cue; when you have not had a square meal for a month and will probably get no salary on Saturday; when you are sent on to play a part of two or three hundred lines with one night's study, and no proper rehearsal. When you can do this, and not dry up, but hold an audience, great or small, drunk or sober, stalls or gallery,

or Royal Box, whether the play is good or bad, and your part actor-proof or impossible, then, and not till then, may you call yourself an actor."

In view of such requirements, the craving of so large a part of the population to strut upon the stage is unaccountable, unless it is due to the fact that they do not realise the qualifications that go to make up a successful actor. "In nine hundred and fifty cases out of a thousand," writes Mr. H. J. Jennings, "the aspirants have no sort of qualification for acting—they cannot even speak the King's English correctly—and of the other fifty not half a dozen ever reach the beginnings of distinction. They fancy they are potential Irvings or Trees or Ellen Terrys, and only the logic of hopeless struggle and bitter failure can cure their delusion. A child crying for the moon is not a more pitiable object than a young man with stage aspirations and no aspirates."

A well-known actor-manager is once reported to have said that an actor should be modest, and that, in his opinion, most of them were. How far this is true of the higher ranks is in some cases open to question, but it certainly cannot be said of the large majority of



those who are desirous of entering the profession. Strange to say, a calling which requires a whole-hearted devotion and many years' hard struggle before those undertaking it can attain a position of any importance, is, by a large number of people, considered to be one to which they were born fully qualified and where success is possible without any previous drudgery.

The stage, with its glamour, appeals, of course, very largely to the class of person whose environment is more or less dull or sordid. The letters received by managers asking for a trial largely come from the class of persons least likely to strut the boards as kings or queens. The following, quoted by Mrs. Alec Tweedie, is a typical example of such letters:

“DEAR SUR,

“I works hon a farm but wants to turn actin. Would lik ingagement for the pantomin in hany ways which you think I be fit for. I sings in the church coir and plais the melodion. I wants to change my work for the stage, has am sick of farm work, cas last tater liftin nigh finished me.”

In the next example, addressed to the then Mr. Bancroft, it would seem that the writer saw little distinction between "the legitimate" and the circus ring.

"SIR,

"Pleese pardon me for taking the liberty but it is on account of myself wishing to be an Actress I feel I never shall be happy until I am one and I can assure you I will not be long lerning what I have to lern. I can jump about, but I am only just beginning to lern dancing, they tell me I am like a frog jumping about I am 17 years old, big for my age when I was 15 I played with other girls pretending to be circus girls I can sing pretty well this writing looks something dreadful but I am writing it at work and I am in a hurry your reply

"ETHEL —"

Also worthy of reproduction, if only for the new word "actorist" that it introduces into the language, is this:

"DEER SIR,

"I have a grate desire to becume An actorist. I have not been on the stage before

but i've allways wished to becume one. I have Nither Father nor Mother. I have two brothers that all the friends i have so I am in the world allone. So if you or anyone would take me I should be extreamly thankfull i have been in service but its no good it seems if i'd been made for the stage its allways in my hed and I am sure I would soon be a good actorist I went to the Princess and the door Keeper He told me to write to any of the managers. Sir i am not a Londoner but Yorkshire Girl i was 16 years old last february.

A very large part of those who aspire to take up theatrical work have nothing to recommend them beyond their own colossal vanity. An elderly spinster once wrote to Ellen Terry asking her advice as regards taking up the stage as a profession. The great actress, with her usual kindness, replied to the effect that it was quite useless for anyone to think of a theatrical career who had not either great beauty or great talent. To this the elderly aspirant replied that Miss Terry's letter had been a great relief to her in view of the fact that she possessed both these necessary qualities.

A crushing reprimand to this type of conceit

was once given by W. S. Gilbert. He received a letter from a young man in Australia, asking him if he would provide the libretto for a comic opera which the writer proposed to set to music. With a conceit that almost transcended impudence, the terms offered were the same as those on which Gilbert worked with Sullivan, and the letter finally concluded with the information that "I am a born musician, although I have been educated as a chemist." In true Gilbert style, the reply ran as follows: "I should rather prefer to work with a born chemist who had been educated as a musician."

A number of children were required for a play which Tree was producing, and an advertisement to that effect was put in the papers. Among the applicants was a widow, who brought with her a small boy. "Has your son ever acted before?" she was asked. "Oh, no, sir," was the mother's proud reply, "but he spoke up beautifully at the inquest."

The would-be actor or actress does occasionally get as far as an audition. When Quin was manager of one of the London theatres, he was pressed to give a trial to one who considered that he was a born actor. Called on to give a specimen of his dramatic powers, he began the

soliloquy of Hamlet, "To be or not to be, that is the question?" These few words were quite sufficient to show the man's utter inability to act, and, breaking in on him, Quin said very decisively, "No question, sir, 'pon my honour—not to be, most certainly."

A young would-be actor offered his services to a well-known manager and was asked to give a specimen of his abilities. He accordingly did a speech or two in a very amateurish manner, and when asked if he had ever performed in comedy, replied that he had taken the part of Abel in *The Alchemist*. "I'm afraid you're wrong there," said the fed-up manager. "It was the part of Cain you acted, for I'm sure you murdered Abel."

"Step back a little," said Tree to a would-be actor who was being tried out. The young man complied, but a moment later there came another demand to "stand back a little." "If I do," came the protest, "I shall be right off the stage." "Yes," said Tree, "that's quite right."

Scope for sarcasm is still provided by the young lady who labours under the hallucination that she was born to star in musical comedy. One fair young thing was given an audition, and the manager waited in politeness

and dumb agony until she had finished. Feeling that all was not well, and anxious to cast any blame on the unoffending instrument, she smiled sweetly at the manager and said, "My voice doesn't seem to blend well with the piano, does it?" "No, madam," came the reply; "I suggest that you try it with the bagpipes."

"Do you think I can do anything with my voice?" asked the would-be star. "Well," said the manager thoughtfully, "it may come in handy in case of a fire."

In another case the would-be chorus lady had passed the beauty test, but when it came to her voice, that was an entirely different matter. She attempted a popular song, but was held up at the end of the first verse by the manager's raised hand. "Is that the end of the verse?" he asked. "That's right," said the lady, "the next part is marked 'refrain.'" "Quite so," came the command, "please obey the instruction."

But, even when the part demands neither musical nor histrionic ability, other qualifications are essential, however simple the part may be. On this point Laddie Cliff tells a story of how when Sir Herbert Tree was playing Wolsey in *Henry VIII* in New York he was

asked by the stage manager to inspect a number of girls who had been collected from outside as ladies-in-waiting to the Queen. After looking at them with disapproval on every line of his face, Tree finally said, "Ladies, just a little more virginity if you don't mind."

Successful in obtaining an engagement, it does not follow that the trials of the novice are over, for he must be prepared for many rebuffs before he receives the appreciation to which he knows only too well that he is entitled. No career could have been more rapid than that of Jack Buchanan, and yet he tells a story of how, in his early days, he was fulfilling an engagement in Edinburgh when the manager of the hall sent for him and said sympathetically, "Honestly, I cannot recommend you for a tour, but you seem a decent chap and you've had a reasonable education. Is there—er—anything else you could do?"

The engagement entails, in some cases, the difficult task of choosing a stage name. Horace Wyndham tells the story of a junior clerk, called Ronald Hutchinson, in the sugar-broking firm of Sir Henry Tate, who, receiving an offer to go on the stage, threw up his job. Called before the head of the firm, he was lectured on

his foolishness, and at the same time told that, if he persisted in going on the stage, it was hoped that he would adopt another name so that none of the staff would recognise him on the programme when he was singing his "vulgar songs." "Oh, that will be all right," replied the youngster; "I've chosen a stage name. I am calling myself Harry Tate in future."

Another rule to be observed by every novice who is drafted into an unimportant part is not to bother the producer; otherwise he may find himself as the suitable object on which that much-worried personage can outpour his wrath or display his gift of sarcasm. A very youthful actor, taking a minor part in one of Barrie's plays, approached Sir James, who was himself producing, and ventured a question on the interpretation he should give to his part which was, indeed, quite a straightforward one. Taking the question as if the whole world depended upon his answer, Sir James replied in his quiet and thoughtful way, "I am glad you have asked me. I should like you to convey when you are acting it that the man you portray has a brother in Shropshire who drinks port."

An echo of the old-time idea that the waster



of the family was good enough for the stage is heard in Russell Craufurd's story of how he was once approached by his landlady, who was troubled with a useless son of about eighteen. "I don't know what to do with him," she complained; "he only eats and sleeps, and he can scarcely read or write. I suppose he'll come to the profession, like the rest of you."

In the course of time the majority of accepted aspirants develop more or less into the finished article, although there are some who will always fail to catch the popular fancy. A member of this brigade, having failed to obtain success on the legitimate stage, proffered his services to a film director. "Are you an actor?" asked the magnate. "I am," was the proud reply. "Have you any experience of acting without an audience?" "Laddie," said the actor in a tone that told of sorrow too deep for words, "acting without an audience is what brought me here."

At the present day the normal method of obtaining employment on the stage is through an agent, a procedure sufficiently explained by Jerome K. Jerome. "I was told," he said, "to go to an agent and tell him exactly what I wanted. I went to two or three agents and told

them all just exactly what I wanted, and they were equally frank and told me just exactly what they wanted, which, speaking generally, was five shillings booking fee to begin with."

Some ladies, however, have obtained their ambition by other and more skilful methods. One girl had tried hard to get Beerbohm Tree to give her a chance, but was unable to secure an interview. She accordingly went to the theatre where Tree was acting, and sat in the stage-door entrance for over a month, seeing him come and go each day to rehearsals. Finally Tree got so used to her face that he thought he knew her, whereupon he spoke to her, and she took the opportunity to tell him why she was there. Her persistency was rewarded by a post.

## XIV

### FROM THE GALLERY

FROM the inception of the theatre to the present time the galleryite has reigned with a varying degree of power as the unpaid judge, sans ermine, of the theatrical world. Perched aloft in his cheap seat, he is able to make or mar a play with far more certainty than the critic who sits at his ease in the stalls below. In his court it is a case of *vox populi vox dei*, and if the production can pass the acid test of popular fancy, its success is assured. No play can ever succeed if the gallery is determinedly against it, but, on the other hand, the approval of the "gods" has often not only laid the foundation of the success of a piece, but the fame of those, hitherto obscure, who have taken part in it. The voice of the critic may be the voice of to-morrow, but the voice of the gallery is that of the whole-hearted instantaneous appreciation or condemnation of to-day—and it is that which matters.

Many hard things have been said about the

boy in the gallery, and some actors, who have probably suffered at his hands, have expressed their pleasure at the gallery comment being less heard now than formerly. Yet it must be admitted that in one respect he served the very useful purpose of giving the death-blow to some item or play that, although poor, might otherwise have hung on for an indefinite period. Let the piece fail to grip or become stale, and it was a case of "thumbs down," and the unfortunate item was cleared away to make room for something that would appeal more to the popular taste.

Kipling's one-time popular poem of *The Absent-Minded Beggar* gave rise to a classic too good to be omitted here. In the early days of the South African War the poem undoubtedly served a good purpose in appealing to the hearts of the charitable, but when the request to "Pay, pay, pay," had been repeated time after time on every stage or platform it became wearisome. It remained, however, for a gallery boy at a South London music-hall to give it its quietus. A famous society beauty had volunteered to recite it in the cause of charity, and to introduce a new note she conceived the idea of dressing herself as Britannia and coming on

the stage with her four little boys, two dressed in khaki and two as sailors. It was a charming picture, and to give a dramatic touch as she came to the lines,

*"Duke's son, cook's son, son of a belted earl,  
Son of a Lambeth publican,"*

she pushed each child forward in turn, whereupon a shocked voice floated down from the gallery, "Oh, 'ush, don't mike a hobby of it, dearie."

On the first night of that unfortunate play *Guy Domville*, produced by George Alexander, it was soon evident from the attitude of the gallery that the play was not going to be a success, but the seal of failure was set on it when Sir George uttered the line, "I am the last of the Domvilles." Scarcely were the words out of his mouth than a voice came from the gallery, "Well, at any rate, that's a comfort to know."

Some years ago, when a version of *Monte Cristo* was produced at the Adelphi, the play was of such length that it dragged badly. At length, at the opening of one scene, the curtain rose on a darkened bedroom, and disclosed an old man sitting beside a bed with a lighted

candle. "I say, mister, we're not keeping you up, are we?" shouted one of the gods.

Gallery criticism is usually very much of the direct order, and its effectiveness largely lies in its brevity and crudity. A play which had failed on the first night to gain popular approval dragged along until the hero exclaimed, "Oh, this is dreadful," when down from aloft came a voice, "Yes, isn't it perfectly awful?" Another play was going none too well, and when, advancing to the front of the stage, the villain hissed to his partner in crime, "Are we alone?" "No, guv'nor," came the reply from one of the few occupants of the gallery, "not ter-night yer ain't, but you will be ter-morrow night."

The hero of yet another failure was proposing to the heroine. For certain reasons she could not give him an answer at once. "Don't press me for an answer now," she pleaded; "wait till next week." "Better take him at once, Miss," shouted one of the gods, "you won't be here next week."

*Rupert of Hentzau* was a difficult piece to follow, especially to those who had not first seen *The Prisoner of Zenda*, and one night at Plymouth, when one of the actors had made

use of the expression, "I'm damned if I understand it," there came a plaintive voice from the gods, "I'm damned if I do either."

The climax of the melodrama had been reached, and the villain, foiled on every side, tottered to the wings, revolver in hand, with the despairing cry, "There's only one thing left—suicide." Then through the tense atmosphere came a cheerful voice, "Don't forget to allow for the wind, mate."

The gallery is no respecter of persons, and even the greatest actors have not been at times exempt from its caustic criticism. Forbes-Robertson, when once playing in *Zilla*, had to search the stage for some title deeds which had been concealed in a well-bucket hanging very conspicuously in the centre of the market-place. Naturally, he looked for them in every place but the right one, when a fed-up voice from aloft brought his search to an end by shouting, "For Heaven's sake, Robertson, look in the bucket and finish the piece."

Garrick also suffered, and had a scene entirely ruined by the interposition of a remark. He was portraying the character of an aged king, who, on his death-bed, was bequeathing his kingdom to his two sons with the words,

“And now between you I bequeath my crown.” Before he could get any farther, there came a voice, “Ye gods! he’s given them half a crown apiece.”

In his early days Henry Irving, travelling with a touring company, took a part in which he had to fight a duel with the villain, and after mortally wounding him he had to kneel by his side and say in tones of anguish, “What have I done?” As it happened, through some failure of the electric light, the theatre was plunged into darkness, whereupon, as if in answer to his appeal, there came the advice from the gods, “Strike a light, mate, and we’ll have a look.”

Tree always preferred, if possible, to make a dramatic entry, but on one occasion this was absolutely ruined by a remark from a gallery boy. In the course of the play he had to enter by throwing open a couple of folding doors, and this he did, standing for a moment on the threshold in an impressive attitude with his arms folded. The effect, however, was entirely spoiled when a voice came, “Next station, Marble Arch.”

In Ireland the gallery boy attained to a position of power far greater than he ever did in England, and no personage, however ex-



alted, was free from his comments. On a Lord-Lieutenant's "command" night in Dublin, an ex-Lord Mayor, Sir Benjamin Guinness, the proprietor of Guinness's XX Stout, entered the Royal box. "Three cheers for the ex-Lord Mayor," shouted one of the gallery. "No, no, Pat," corrected another of the same ilk, "three cheers for the XX Lord Mayor."

Gallery comment is also heard when the actor or actress is a popular favourite, and this, of course, usually strikes a more familiar note. Arthur Roberts was persuaded to take part in a romantic play with Florence St. John, and threw himself heart and soul into the production. He came on the stage a very good likeness of the starving poet Chatterton, but it was, however, soon evident that the audience preferred Roberts in his true rôle of laughter-maker, and this was made abundantly clear when there came a voice from the gallery, "Chuck it, Arthur, old sport, and put a bit of red on your nose, me lad."

A popular actor, who was playing a very tragic part, was in one scene seated at a table in a country inn, when a maid was to enter and bring him a mutton chop. At this point he turned from the table to say his lines. On one

particular evening the property chop could not be found and a gingerbread biscuit was put in its place. So upset was the actor by this unexpected change that, instead of turning aside to express his agony of mind in the words, "O God, how long will it last?" he addressed the words to the biscuit. A ripple of laughter ran round the house, which changed to a roar when a wit in the gallery shouted, "Cheer up, guv'nor. It's pay night to-morrow; you'll hang out."

The familiar note was also strongly apparent on an occasion when Arthur Roberts and Phyllis Broughton were on the stage together. Following his usual custom, Arthur took the opportunity, under cover of the play, to tell Miss Broughton a funny little story, which had the effect of sending her off into a fit of laughter. This was so infectious and so whole-hearted that the audience laughed also, until there came a hoarse voice from the gallery, "Come on, Phyllis, nah, tell us all abaht it; tell us what Arthur said; don't forget we paid to 'ear it, old girl."

It is the actress, rather than the actor, to whom the familiar remark is usually addressed. Miss Olga Nethersole was playing once in

*Carmen* at the Gaiety, and her love-making was of the "reserved" order. Apparently, in the opinion of the gallery, she carried this a little too far, for after a long scene with Don Jose, there came a voice from above, "I say, Olga, are we supposed to hear all this?"

Another actress, whose dignity might have been thought to have spared her such familiarity, was Mrs. Siddons. She appeared once in the north of England and was taking poison in her most deliberate tragedy-queen manner. A tense silence hung over the house as, having uttered her last words, she raised the fatal cup to her lips, when, from above, came the encouraging advice, "That's reet, Molly. Soop it oop, ma lass, soop it oop."

Another class of gallery remark, while free from criticism of either actors or the play, voices some comment that sends the whole house into a paroxysm of laughter. Such a one is the old story concerning the production of *Faust* at the Queen's Theatre, Dublin. The part of Mephistopheles was being taken by a somewhat corpulent actor, and when it came to the part where he descended to Hell through a trap-door, he unfortunately jammed. At that moment there came an excited voice from the

gods, "Arrah, bhoys, that's a comfort inyway. Hell's full."

Two newsboys who were witnessing *Hamlet* from the gallery were so thrilled with the performance that it was with difficulty they could suppress their excitement. With bated breath they watched Hamlet kill Polonius, the King, and Laertes, and finally when the Moody Dane himself expired, one of them could contain his excitement no longer, but in a voice that could be heard all over the theatre shouted at his friend, "Blimey, Bill, what a time for selling special extras."

With bated breath the packed theatre watched the heroine, who, apparently deserted by her lover, cast off by her family, and dogged by the villain, seemed to be in the last extremity. In vain she looked round; there seemed no means of escape. "I must end it all," she wailed in heart-rending accents, "I must indeed end it all; but where can I buy poison?" "You try the bar of this theatre, missie," came a voice from the gallery.

There are also times when some of the gallery, carried away by the apparent realism of the stage, forget that they are in the kingdom of make-believe.

Forbes-Robertson tells how Sir John Hare was playing in *Caste*, in one scene of which he was alone on the stage and vainly searched his pocket for tobacco. Finally he found a little dust in his waistcoat pocket which he proceeded to gather carefully together into his pipe, when a man in the gallery, moved by his apparent poverty, threw his well-filled pouch on the stage, which landed right at the actor's feet.

Gallery comment is only to be expected when some small error or oversight in make-up or costume gives the lie to the spoken word. When Charles Warner was playing the part of the hero in *The Last Chance*, he was supposed to be starving in a garret, and, lifting his hands to Heaven, he exclaimed, "Our last farthing gone, starvation stares us in the face." He had, however, forgotten that he was wearing a diamond ring, which sparkled gaily in the limelight, until there came a voice from the gallery, "Why don't you pawn your diamond ring?"

In times past a favourite pastime of the occupants of the gallery during such times as the play failed to claim their entire attention was the sucking of oranges and the cracking of nuts. At one seaside town at which he was playing, Kean was so much annoyed by the

noise made in cracking nuts that he gave instructions to his staff to buy up every nut in the town. By this manœuvre he obtained two evenings' peace, but the sudden demand for the fruit had sent all the local fruiterers wiring to Covent Garden for further supplies, with the result that there was a glut in the market, prices came down with a rush, and nuts being cheaper than ever, the youths of the town bought in liberal quantities.

Although in these days the actor has no defence against attacks from the gallery (except on those occasions when the services of the "chucker-out" are necessary), the gallery boy of the past often received as good as he gave from the chairman, an individual who was very prominent in the early days of the music-halls. One Boxing Night at the Variety, Hoxton, where *The Forty Thieves* was being produced, the performance was scarcely on the magnificent scale that the posters had led the audience to expect, and the forty thieves, for example, were represented by some ten supers, who marched from the wings into the cave, out at the back, and round to the front again, this manœuvre being repeated four times. It did not, however, impose upon the gallery, and

very soon there came a shout of, "Hi, guv'nor, where's the other thirty thieves?" Rising in his seat, the chairman glared in the direction from which the question had come, and, in a voice of thunder, retorted, "They're up in the gallery."

The proprietor of a small Dublin theatre used at times to take a hand in the play. Once, taking the part of Iago, he was much interrupted by satirical remarks from the gallery, and, at length, losing his temper, he walked down to the footlights and addressed the offenders with, "If you bhoys in the gallery don't kape quiet, me and the black (pointing to Othello) will come up and knock the sauce out of yez."

Attempts to answer the gallery, however, are not always successful. On one occasion George Grossmith and his son were performing in a very dreary play called *The Gay Pretenders*, which certainly failed to meet with the approval of the gallery, and this they soon signified in the usual manner. At this Grossmith, who, like many other actors, could not brook unfavourable criticism, lost his temper and called up to the gallery, "You're very funny up there." "More than you are down there,


guv'nor," came the stinging reply from one of the boys.

Sometimes, though such occasions are growing rarer and rarer, it happens that the gallery boy is too emphatic or too personal in his criticisms, and when this happens he is very likely to find himself surveying the theatre—from outside. A youngster who found himself in this situation was protesting in very florid language when a policeman came along and asked what the argument was about. "It's all right," said the be-medalled theatre attendant, one-time boxing champion of his regiment, "he's been a naughty boy, and so the manager had him chucked out." "Rubbish," put in the youth; "I was only passing some fruit to a pal of mine. I suppose I can do that?" "No," smiled the attendant, "not when you're in the gallery and your pal's on the stage, and the fruit is a rotten tomato."

It is difficult to realise what a power the gallery boy once was, and how strong were the unwritten laws that bound the community together. Mr. Arthur Bouchier has a story of his "dresser" who was also a member of the celebrated Gaiety Gallery Boys. Bouchier had produced a new play, and it was noticed



that the dresser, who was present at the dress rehearsal, looked particularly gloomy and morose. On the first night when Bouchier came off the stage and went to his dressing-room, he found it locked and his dresser missing. Search was made for him and he was found in the gallery among his old friends loudly "booing" his master. "Arraigned before me," said Bouchier, "he maintained the firmest attitude possible and asserted boldly, 'No, sir, I am your faithful servant behind the scenes, but as an independent man and an honest gallery boy, I am bound to express my unbiased opinion either for or against any play which I may happen to see at a first night.'"



## XV

### THE FILMS

At present the majority of film jokes and witticisms are either technical or depend on the numerous matrimonial alliances of its stars. Of these two types the latter are by far the more numerous, and, if we are to believe reports, some of the leading lights of the film world, if only given time and a speeding-up of the granting of divorce decrees, would soon bid fair to rival King Solomon in the number of their partners. Two film stars were walking down a street in Hollywood when one of them remarked, "Who was that man at whom you just smiled?" "Oh," said the other, "I've forgotten his name for the moment, but he was quite the nicest man I've ever married."

The ladies were chatting over the tea-cups about the pictures they had seen, and finally a celebrated film star came under discussion. "Yes," said one lady, "she moves in the best circles and has made some good marriages, but she has divorced all her husbands." "Quite

so," put in another lady; "you mean rather that she moves in the best triangles."

The film actress had decided to make yet one more run in the Matrimonial Stakes, and so with her latest fiancé turned up one morning at the Registry Office in order to make the necessary arrangements. The Registrar, being a conscientious man, asked a good many questions, the effect of which was to render the lady very peevish. Finally, he came to the crucial one, "Have you ever been married before, and, if so, to whom and at what date and place?" "Say," said the lady, now thoroughly angry, "what's this, anyway? It's a marriage licence I want, not a memory test."

The star, or her agent, is, of course, anxious that her frequent incursions into matrimony shall receive their due meed of publicity. It is said that one queen of the film world, who had fixed her *n*th-time nuptials for the same day as the General Election, wrote to the Prime Minister asking if the Election could not be put off, as she was rather afraid it would drive her off the front picture page of the papers.

In the course of its short life the film industry has collected around itself a vocabulary that is all its own. For example, a small flood-

light is a "baby," and the covering screen to subdue its glare is a "silk." During the making of a big film representing a dock scene, a crowd of "temporaries" in the form of some stalwart young dock labourers and stevedores were engaged to take part in a crowd scene. At the same time there were also a number of young ladies dressed in light summer costume representing passengers. All was ready to begin the shoot when suddenly, to the consternation of the fair ones, the producer's voice boomed out, "Now then, boys, get a move on and tear the silks off them babies."

To those who follow the all-engrossing new occupation, everything is looked upon or considered in terms of the pictures. The film producer had just become a proud father, and the nurse had come into his study to introduce him to his new-born son. "Here is your son and heir, sir," she announced. The producer looked up for a moment from his work. "Sorry," he said after an appraising glance; "not quite the type we want."

Another aspect of film life which has added humour as well as variety to the life of the actor is the dangerous stunts in which from time to time he is called upon to play a leading part.

In one hair-raising melodrama, the hero, new to the game, suddenly discovered that he was called upon to descend a frightful precipice. "Here, this is no good," he said nervously; "suppose the darned rope should break." "Bo," said the producer with delight, "you sure have struck an idea. We'll have that."

In such a dangerous occupation it is only the very bravest need apply, and it does not follow that even a V.C. can go through the life of some film actors without showing signs of alarm. An applicant for a job presented himself at the office of a firm that specialised in stunt productions. "So you think," said the manager, "that you can stand all that we require of our men. In this business we require men to go up in the air, down under the sea, scale precipices, dive to the depths, and, in fact, do or dare anything. It's quite a common thing for one of our actors to be thrown, bound hand and foot, from a first-floor window into the river." "Oh, I can stand that," said the applicant confidently; "I was a collector in an easy-payment furniture shop for some years."

The films have revolutionised the art of love-making. No longer now is the average girl satisfied with the halting or only half-articulate

protestations of her lover ; she expects of him that he will plead his cause in impassioned accents, or register on his mobile countenance the ecstasy of joy or the depths of despair. " You don't love me, George," complained one tearful young lady to her fiancé. " Course I do," said the practical George ; " what put an idea like that into your head ? " " I'm sure you don't," continued the disconsolate girl, "'cause when you talk to me your chest doesn't go up and down like it does in the lovers in the pictures."

In the early days the films were very much of a surprise to many people, but perhaps the most surprised man was the one who had dined not too wisely, and on his way home, accompanied by a friend, the latter suggested that it might be advisable if they dropped in somewhere and sat quietly for a bit in order to give the merry one a chance to sober up. Accordingly they turned into a theatre and sat down, but before they had been there long the inebriated one began to sob quietly to himself. " What's the matter ? " asked his friend. " Can't you sit quiet and look at the pictures ? " " 'Sno good, ole man," sobbed the other, " I've gone stone-deaf. I can't hear a word they're

saying ”

To-day it would seem to be the ambition of every young man and young woman to make an appearance on the screen, even though their rôle might not be that of a star. One young man proudly announced to all his friends that he had taken part in the production of a film, and when pressed for details announced that it was called *The Mystery of the Pink Bed-chamber*. “ But,” said a friend, “ I saw that one the other night, and I don’t remember seeing you in it. What part did you take ? ” “ Well,” said the other, “ it wasn’t what you might call a leading part, but in that part where the burglar is alarmed by a noise outside, I was the approaching footsteps.”

Competition and popularity demand a continuous struggle for further improvement in every respect, and this applies even to language, so much so that before long the films will rival the B.B.C. as an exponent of English as it should be spoken. The picture expert was one of the chosen race, and he was sitting in the projection room reviewing the scenes that had been taken the day before. At last he was finished and gave his decision. “ That last scene will have to be re-taken,” he announced

to the director. "What's the matter with it?" asked the latter in astonishment. "The diction is wrong." "Diction, why, I heard every word." "Did you? Vell, I didn't. I didn't hear the final k in swimink."

In the pursuit of this increased efficiency no effort is spared to prevent the creeping in of anachronisms, or anything that may be in any way out of place, yet it does sometimes happen that a fault slips through and is not discovered until the film is before the public. In one such case there was a very fine scene portraying the marriage of the hero and heroine. As they knelt before the altar, one sharp-sighted member of the audience noticed that there were certain weird markings in white chalk on the soles of the shoes of both bride and bridegroom. A close investigation disclosed the fact that they were undoubtedly hotel marks, denoting the room outside which the shoes had been placed, and that in both cases the numbers were the same.

A type of film which, in the early days of the industry, was often not correct in detail, was that one dealing with military subjects. The hero of one such was a young officer who, in one scene, appeared fighting in the Sudan war



of 1882, while on his manly breast was displayed the ribbon of the Waterloo medal of 1815.

Errors in the spoken word are obviously not so frequent, but even these crop out from time to time. In a film which dealt with the Middle Ages, the old Baron was seen sitting in his baronial hall as one of his retainers entered. "My lord," he announced, "a fair maiden standeth at the portal lacking food and raiment." "Gadzooks," replied the worthy baron; "this must not be. Feed her and bring her in."

Humorous also are the producer's occasional comments on the acting of some of those taking part. In an impressive scene the villain, at last, was brought to bay, and fell by the sword of the avenging hero. The acting was not at all to the producer's liking. "No, that won't do at all," he exclaimed at length, and then turning to the villain, he added, "For goodness' sake, man, put more life into your dying! "

## XVI

### ON THE STAGE AND OFF

PLAYING in *Drink*, a drama founded on Zola's famous novel *The Dram Shop*, Charles Warner achieved great success as a French peasant who, slowly but surely slipping down-hill, finished his career in delirium tremens. The play attracted great attention, and Warner became the hero of all the temperance societies. During the run of the play, he was once invited to a public dinner at which many princes of commerce were present. In the course of the after-dinner speeches one gentleman told how he had made his fortune through the mustard people wasted. Another related how he had made his by the pins people lost. Then a clergyman got up and proposed Warner's health, describing him as an example of what the stage could do for the benefit of humanity and teetotalism. Warner's reply to the toast ran as follows: "Gentlemen, I owe my success in life entirely to *Drink*. Had it not been for *Drink* I should still be a struggling actor.

*Drink* has been my benefactor, and I hope you may all profit by it. Here's your good health, gentlemen."

W. S. Gilbert, at the rehearsal of one of his operas, once turned to an actor who was not too well pleased with his part, and observed, "At this point, Mr. A., you will, of course, wait for the laugh." "Certainly," replied the comedian; "but please don't forget that I live at Surbiton."

Toole, who was the soul of generosity, always wanted to do the paying, and on the least excuse would say, "It's my shout." Once at Blackpool he went to church with his old friend Lowne, and when the latter was about to put his mite into the plate, Toole seized his arm and whispered, "No, no, it's my shout," at the same time putting in a contribution for the two.

Great actors have not in their early days always met with the success that they deserved. In 1825 Edmund Kean was hooted from the stage of a Boston theatre. The celebrated Sothorn, in 1852, playing in *The Heir at Law*, made such a failure of his part that the uproar among the audience interfered with the pro-

gress of the play. Finally Sothern approached the footlights, and, holding up his hand for silence, said, "Ladies and gentlemen, if you will allow me to finish the play, I will go home and learn how to act." He was discharged from the company next day.

A playbill may give a wrong impression. During the tour of *Cynara*, the theme of which was based on Ernest Dowson's line of poetry, "I have been faithful to thee, Cynara, in my fashion," the playbills appeared with the announcement: "I have been faithful to thee, Cynara, in my fashion . . . by arrangement with Gladys Cooper."

H. J. Jennings, editor and dramatic critic, tells how once, being at a certain gathering where Sims Reeves was present, and being asked to sing, he volunteered Sims's own particular song, "My pretty Jane." When he had finished the great singer came across to him and said, "Mr. Jennings, I have heard many people attempt to sing that song. I have often attempted to sing it myself, but in all my experience I never knew anyone who so carefully avoided the tune as you have done."

Miss Fay Compton once went to a firm of theatrical costumiers wearing a new frock, which, in her opinion, stamped her as one of the elect. Her pride, however, received a rude fall when the shopwalker came forward, and, after glancing at her appraisingly, said, "Tights upstairs, miss, if you please."

A singer, well known on the music-hall stage, had been spending the evening with some friends, and at a late hour was asked by the hostess to give them just one more song. He protested that it was too late, and that he might disturb the neighbours. "Oh, don't mind the neighbours," said the lady; "they poisoned our dog yesterday."

Derek Oldham, the actor and singer, was once also the recipient of a similarly doubtful compliment. He was on his way in his car to the theatre, and was what is known as "getting up his voice" by singing scales. During a block in the traffic a taxi-driver near looked at him, and then turning to the actor's chauffeur said, "Blimey, I thought summat 'ad gone wrong with your exhaust."

The agent's office was at the top of a very high building in which there was no lift, so to save clients the trouble of mounting so many stairs a "Wanted" board was displayed at the bottom when there were any vacancies. One day, to the joy of an old out-of-work actor, this board was displayed. He mounted the hundred and one stairs with difficulty, but with great hopes of a job, only to read on the notice board in the office, "Wanted, a strong theatrical basket, 4 ft. by 2 ft."

Somehow or other the lady vocalist could not keep with the orchestra. Finally the conductor gave it up as a bad job, stopped, laid down his baton, and addressed the culprit with, "Young lady, this is an orchestra, not an elastic band."

Carlton was once travelling by train to a race meeting, when, just before the train left, some five or six card-sharpers jumped into the carriage. Naturally, the old three-card trick was started. Carlton was allowed to win the first game, pocketed the pound he had won, and then refused to play any more. On this the crowd grew ugly, whereupon, giving them back

the pound, Carlton said, "Now let me show you how we work the trick where I come from." To the astonishment of the sharpers, they were, even after three tries, unable to spot the lady, the reason being that Carlton had palmed it.

Shuter (a one-time celebrated actor) travelling down by stage coach to play in the north of England, was stopped on Finchley Common by a highwayman. The only other occupant of the coach was an old gentleman, whom the highwayman at once relieved of all his valuables. Then turning to Shuter, who pretended to be asleep, the knight of the road asked for his money. "Money?" said the actor, looking inexpressibly vacant. "Oh, sir, they never trusts me with any money; uncle here always pays for me, turnpikes and all." With a loud curse at having wasted his time on an imbecile, the highwayman rode off, leaving Shuter in the enjoyment of his possessions.

When asked why he was so fond of going to church, Toole replied that he talked so much during the week that it was a treat to hear another fellow's voice.

A young Jewish East-End-er took the Effingham Theatre for the purpose of producing his own play at his own expense, and by diligently canvassing his friends secured a full house. In the last act of the play the young Jewish hero, supposedly just returned from abroad, discovered that his agent had been fleecing his tenants in every possible way, and accordingly he handed him over to justice and returned to the tenants all that had been taken from them. Up to then the play had proceeded on normal lines, but directly the Jewish hero started his refunding the entire audience rushed as one to the office and demanded their money back, giving, when asked, as a reason, "Vy, the author told us this play was true to human nature."

The problem of how to deal with a small audience was once satisfactorily settled by Robert Courtneidge. The company was on tour, it was a snowy night, and when the curtain went up the audience was found to consist of only seven persons. The seven were accordingly invited round to the back of the stage, mulled ale was procured, and with song and story the fun was kept up to a late hour,



after which the whole company escorted the audience to their respective homes.

On one occasion Gilbert was conducting a rehearsal and had taken a well-known actor back and back again over his part. At last the criticised one could stand it no longer, and turning to Gilbert, he said, "Look here, Mr. Gilbert, I'm not the best-tempered of men." "No," said Gilbert, "neither am I." "I stand six feet in my stockings," said the actor. "I stand six feet four," was the reply. "But I am a very strong man." "So am I," said Gilbert, "but if you want to know the difference between us, I'm a very clever man."

The necessity for an actor to be able to make a quick change when he is not getting his stuff over is shown in a story of George Robey, who was once taking the part of a man up from the country, who, having dined too well, asked a policeman the way to the Savoy, and was directed to the theatre instead of the hotel. Arriving at the former place, he went up to the box office and asking for a room was given a ticket and shown into a box. Taking possession of this, he took off his clothes, opened the

door, put out his boots, called for the chambermaid (the programme girl), and complained that there was an awful row going on in the room opposite (by which he meant the stage)—one man threatening to shoot a woman—and would she please tell them to be quiet, etc. Hardly had Robey started when he sensed that something was wrong and that the idea of his being drunk had not caught, so, with a flash of genius, he switched over the part to that of a Yorkshireman in London for the first time, and, speaking in dialect, soon had the house rocking with laughter.

A certain popular comedian was waiting one Sunday morning for a train on the Brighton platform and, finding time hanging somewhat heavily on his hands, tried to get into conversation with a rather sullen young man. Accosting him in his usual breezy way, the comedian remarked that it was a fine day. "Um," said the sullen one. "Delightful place, Brighton," said the actor, "delightful. You live here, I suppose?" "Yes." "Ah, lucky fellow. Wish I did. Magnificent air, so healthy. I wonder now, are you married?" "Yes," came the monosyllabic reply. "Splendid, splendid. I

like to hear of a fellow being married. Any—er—little tots now? Any family?” “No, there ain’t,” came the decisive reply; “we was only married this morning.” “Well, well,” beamed the irrepressible comedian, “after all, we live in a rapid age.”

Once, when staying at Zürich, Brandon Thomas, the author of *Charley’s Aunt*, called a waiter in the hotel and asked him if he could recommend any play running in the town. The waiter replied that there was nothing on but a vulgar piece at the music-hall, a stupid English farce. “Indeed,” said Brandon Thomas. “What is the name of it?” “*Charley’s Aunt*,” replied the waiter.

Theatrical producers have usually their own ways of doing things, although these do not always chime in with the recognised order of things. On one occasion a producer at Drury Lane, who for good reasons shall be nameless, ordered the stage hand, whose duty it was to make the thunder, to hurry up. At that moment there came a clap of real thunder. “Not a damn bit like it,” said the mighty one. “Have another go.”

Both on and off the stage Kemble was always the actor. He was on one occasion being pressed for payment of income-tax at a time when he was rather short of money. Drawing himself up to his full height, and assuming an air of majesty, Kemble thus addressed the importunate collector: "Sir, I now pay you this exorbitant charge, but I must ask you to explain to Her Majesty that she must not in future look upon me as a source of income."

The compliments paid to performers are sometimes capable of being taken in either of two ways. Arthur Roberts, when a boy, was once chosen to sing at a Crystal Palace Festival, and in the course of the proceedings had to sing a hymn alone. One old lady sitting near the stage appeared to take a special interest in him, and at the close of his effort she was heard to say, "I hope I shall soon hear him sing in Heaven."

An old-time actor, not conspicuous for his education, having climbed somewhat up the ladder, endeavoured to cover deficiencies by a highfalutin manner and the use of long words. Congratulated by a brother actor on his wed-

ding, he said, "Thank you ; it was very beautiful. Our marriage was consummated on the altar of St. Mary Abbot's, Kensington."

The variety artist was in the habit of spending several hours each day practising at the piano, much to the discomfiture of his next-door neighbour. One day there appeared in the window the notice, "Piano for Sale." This was followed next day by one in the adjoining villa, "Hip hip, hooray."

Kay Souper, at one time a member of the Benson Company, was on one occasion performing at Manchester, and thinking he would not be wanted, he absented himself from the rehearsal in order to attend the Manchester Autumn Races. Next day he was hauled before "the Chief" and fined £1. He paid with a "wrong 'un" that he had received on the race-course the day before.

"Everyone on the stage," says Jerome K. Jerome, "calls the actresses 'my dear.' You soon pick it up, especially in the case of the young and pretty ones."

John Stetson, a famous American producer, once staged *The Gondoliers* in Chicago. It was, however, so badly attended that in indignation he changed the sign on the front of the theatre to *The Gone Dollars*.

Chatterton, at one time the lessee of Drury Lane, had a mania for litigation, and in most of the cases into which he plunged he was unsuccessful. On one occasion, when producing *The Forty Thieves* at Sadler's Wells, he was asked his opinion as to how the ballet girls should be dressed. "Dress 'em as lawyers," he growled, and accordingly this was done, with the exception that the robes, bodices, tights, and shoes were red, thus conveying an idea of the future destination of the legal profession.

Mr. Charles Cochran tells an amusing story of the well-known child impersonators, the Duncan Sisters. Soon after their arrival in London they went out one morning to do some shopping and were just about to enter a shop when they saw over the door "By appointment." Hastily they backed out and were just about to enter another when they observed the-

same notice. Returning to the theatre, they made anxious enquiries as to why it was necessary to make an appointment to buy a packet of pins or a yard of ribbon.

The Benson Company were at one time almost as well known for their athletic prowess as for their theatrical triumphs, and Lady Benson tells the story of how they were once playing football against an Irish team, called the Young Men's Christian Association, in which the 'play of their opponents was unusually rough and their language highly coloured. After a very hard match the Bensonians just managed to win, and the Christian Association gave them three cheers. At the conclusion of these Sir Frank stepped forward and called for "Three cheers for the Young Men's Christian Association," but hardly were the words out of his mouth than there came a shout from some unknown person, "Not Christian, for God's sake."

An amateur operatic company was giving three performances of a certain opera, and on the morning after the first show two residents, one of whom had been present the night before,

were discussing the performance. At that moment a third person, muffled to the neck, came down the street. "That's Jack Williams," said the one who had been present; "he's as hoarse as a crow this morning." "Principal performer?" queried the second. "No," was the reply; "he's the prompter."

Actresses receive invitations of many kinds, but few have received so sinister a one as Miss Lohr, who, while rehearsing a tragic piece, was on one occasion approached by the stage carpenter, who, in a sepulchral voice said, "Hex-cuse me, miss, but can you step dahn below a minute; I want to measure you for your coffin."

Terriss, always ready with excuses, was once so late for a rehearsal as to receive a well-merited rebuke from Irving. "I think you'll be sorry you've spoken to me like this, gov'nor," said Terriss sadly. "Rubbish," said Irving. "No more of your hanky-panky tricks, Terriss." "Tricks, gov'nor? I think you'll regret having said that when you learn that my poor dear mother passed away this morn-



ing," and with this Terriss burst into tears. Irving was naturally full of contrition, and, realising the impossibility of expecting acting under such sad circumstances, gave the bereaved one the day off. A few weeks later Terriss and Ellen Terry were one evening looking through the curtain at the audience, just before the play began, when suddenly Terriss cried, "See that dear old woman sitting in the fourth row of the stalls, that's my dear old mother." He quite forgot that she had died three weeks earlier.

A celebrated actor strolled into his club and made his way to the telephone box, carefully leaving the door open in order that his conversation might be overheard. "Hello, hello," he began. "Is that you, Mr. X? (naming a manager high in the theatrical world). Good. I got your letter this morning, but £100 a week is no good to me. You'll make it £150? No, £200 is my price, not a penny less. You agree to £200? Very well, I'll come round to-morrow and sign the contract. Good-bye." Coming out of the box, the actor beamed on the listening crowd. At that moment the club secretary entered the room. "Excuse me, sir," he said,

"but that telephone has been out of order since yesterday. We're expecting a man in to see to it shortly."

As illustrating some of the troubles of a theatrical manager, Charles Brookfield used to tell a story of how one season, when he was running a play at the Haymarket, he bought a few gross of Japanese fans from Liberty's and sprinkled them about the theatre for the convenience of the audience. Later he found that several people had come in with orders, collected five or six fans apiece, and gone off without even bothering to witness the performance.

When a child, Lady Bancroft once recited at an amateur entertainment given to aid a church building fund. The ladies present, most of whom were district visitors and church workers, were loud in her praise, and even suggested giving her a toy as a slight acknowledgement of the pleasure she had given them. Then someone mentioned that she was the daughter of an actor. At once the half-opened bags were closed, and amidst such expressions as, "Horrid," "Oh dear," "Unfortunate child," they drew away as if she had the plague.

An excellent story of Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree's grand manner is told by Mr. George Graves. The great actor was engaging some children for a show, and came down to interview them still dressed as Wolsey in his scarlet robes. Suddenly with a theatrical gesture he pointed to one little girl. "How old is that child?" he asked of the nervous mother. "Eight, sir," was the reply. "Eight—then wipe her nose," ordered Tree in his most majestic manner.

An old lady had come up from the country to see an author who was producing one of his own plays at a London theatre. Arriving at the stage door, she was told it was impossible to see him, as he was rehearsing night and day. "Good gracious," she exclaimed; "and do they run through those things beforehand?"

The old idea that the stage was not quite respectable dies slowly. An actress with a large amount of luggage was travelling to join a touring company, and was informed by a porter that unless she belonged to the theatrical profession she would have to pay excess. "But I am an actress," said the girl. "Well, why didn't

you say so at once?" said the indignant porter. "You can't expect me to go about all day insulting passengers by asking if they are actresses."

Bensley, before he went on the stage, was an officer in the army. He was met one day by a Scotsman who had been in the same regiment and the latter, anxious to chat with his old brother officer, but being ashamed to be seen in the street with a player, hurried him into an obscure coffee-house, where he began to rate him for joining such a profession. At length, coming to an end of his tirade, the Scotsman asked, "What do you make by this new business of yours?" "From seven hundred to a thousand a year," replied Bensley. "A thousand a year," said the astonished Scot; "why, mon, hae ye any vacancies in your corps?"

"What is the audience shouting for?" asked the author of the theatre manager. "They are shouting for the author," replied the latter. "Then hadn't I better go on?" said the expectant one. "I guess not," came the crushing reply; "they're all armed with rotten eggs."

The new assistant was blithely whistling as he went about his duties in the shop. "Here, stop that whistling," said the boss. "But, sir," said the pert youngster, "Ruskin praises the man who whistles at his work." "That'll do," was the reply; "don't start quoting your music-hall comedians to me."

Sims Reeves, though a great singer, was a very poor actor. During the performance of *Guy Mannering* he sang two songs which were introduced as follows: In one of the scenes a couple of ruffians, apropos of nothing at all, brought on a stolen piano, dumped it down on the stage, and made off to the cry of, "I hear footsteps; let us disappear." With that, on walked Sims Reeves, and remarking, "Oh, here is a piano; let us have a little music," plunged immediately into his ditties and held all spell-bound till he had disappeared. On this the robbers reappeared, and remarking, "Ha, ha, they have gone; let us take her off," the piano made its exit also.

Two young ladies of the chorus had invited some gentlemen friends to supper, and the festivities had been kept up until the early-

morning hours. Next morning at breakfast they were confronted by a very indignant and righteous landlady. "I would have you understand, young ladies," she said, "that my house is not a Bovril."

A party of variety artistes, going down to Sandringham to play in a command performance, found on alighting at Wolverton Junction that a royal omnibus had been sent to meet them. Into this they all climbed, Dan Leno the last of all. As he got in he looked up at the tall footman, who was holding the door open for him, and, pointing to the other inmates of the vehicle, queried in a tone reminiscent of Bow Street experiences, "Night charges?"

At a rehearsal of *H.M.S. Irresponsible*, Arthur Roberts, who was playing the part of a naval officer, was noticed to have his sword buckled on the wrong side. This was pointed out to him. "Very well," said the irrepressible Arthur, "turn the ship round."

1ST CRITIC (in favour): "He's a finished article, don't you think?"

2ND CRITIC (against): "I'm afraid not. They're giving him another call."

Rewards to play-writers have not always erred on the side of generosity. Douglas Jerrold received slightly over £50 for *Black-eyed Susan*, and the play ran for over three hundred and fifty performances and brought £75,000 into the theatre treasury.

Once, when Miss Irene Vanbrugh was acting in *The Twelve Pound Look*, she was intently watched from the wings by two music-hall comedians. "'Arry," said one at length, "who's the bloke wot wrote this one-act piece?" "Some fellow called Barrie, I believe," said the other. "Oh, did he?" replied No. 1. "Then he shall do our next."

A well-known comedian found it necessary to consult a doctor. "What do you drink?" said the medico. "Brandy and water," was the reply, "six to twelve glasses a day." "Good Heavens," said the doctor, "I wonder you have any coat left to your stomach." "Well, doctor," said the invalid, "my friends wonder that I have any coat left to my back."

Sarah Bernhardt once received a wonderful reception in *Fédora*, but after a time the tem-

pest of applause changed to one of laughter. This was caused by two one-armed men in the front row of the gallery who, anxious not to be left out of the tribute to the singer, were clapping their remaining hands together.

A well-known Shakespearian actor was once asked why he always stayed so late at his club. "Economy, my boy," was the answer; "I go home by the workman's train in the morning for a penny."

During the long run of *Charley's Aunt* at the Globe one member of the company received a letter asking if it was possible for him to let the writer have two seats. "My name may not be familiar to you (wrote the applicant), but I venture to remind you that during a long residence in Birmingham I had the distinguished honour of cutting your late revered father's corns."

"Do you call it kindness in a man to remit nothing to his family while away?" asked an actor. "Yes," replied Douglas Jerrold, "unremitting kindness."



The knife-thrower at the music-hall threw knife after knife, pinning his pretty assistant between rows of gleaming blades. The audience watched in silence for some time, until at last one spectator turned to another and said, "Bill, let's clear out. The old fool's missed her again."

Joseph Fox, a well-known actor at one time, was the son of a fishmonger, and financed Charles Dillon in what turned out to be a losing tour. Visiting Sheffield, his native town, he was anxious that his old mother should see him act, and the play presented being *Hamlet*, he took the part of Polonius while Dillon enacted that of "the moody one." At the point where Hamlet remarked to him, "I know you, you are a fishmonger," Mrs. Fox thought this was a little bit too personal, and, rising from her seat in wrath, she shouted loudly, "Well, if he is a fishmonger, he's been a good friend to you, he has."

A well-known actor one day turned up at rehearsal in obvious agitation, and on being asked the cause replied, "Well, my donkey of

a brother was married yesterday to a penniless girl of the name of Sharp." "My dear fellow," said a colleague, "don't worry; it was a musical wedding—there was a flat and a sharp."

Lord Aberdeen tells of an English stage manager at the Odéon Theatre, Paris, who had been born within the sound of Bow Bells. One day he was heard addressing the stage hands as follows: "Yer bloomin' idjots, why don't yer do what I tell yer? (Bows and smiles by the French stage hands.) Don't stand there grinnin', yer blinkety blink French frogs. (More bows and smiles.) Stop yer grinnin' and do what I tells yer. (More smiles and terrific outburst on the part of the assistant stage manager.) At this point the stage manager himself came on the scene and pointed out that the stage hands did not understand a word he was saying. "Bless me, guv'nor," was the reply, "I'm that beside myself I've forgotten me French as well as me English."

A quarrel in the theatrical world usually ends in one actor taking another's part.

In the same boat in which Gypsy Smith, the noted evangelist, crossed from America there also travelled a company of theatrical artistes. Among these was a vaudeville artiste who, struck by the appearance of the evangelist, asked who he was. "Gypsy Smith," she was told. "Oh, yes," she said; "of course, I remember now. I followed him one week in Nebraska. Shucks, he's a dandy artiste! He hadn't left a dollar in the town."

Jimmy Glover tells a story of once booking Dan Leno for a show at Bexhill, and, knowing his forgetfulness, on the morning of the day he was to appear sent him the following wire: "You leave Victoria at eleven, arrive at one, show is at three. Lunch with me. Glover." The reply came back in typical Leno form: "Buy another knife and fork. Bringing wife. Leno."

An actor, never conspicuous for his industry, had married a rich woman and retired from the stage. One day, while out walking with his wife, he was passed by two former brother actors. "Hello," said one of them to the other, "there goes Gussie with his labour-saving device."

An old worthy from across the border had come up to London for the week-end, and on the Saturday night his English entertainer suggested that they should drop in to a music-hall. "No, no," said the Scot; "I never go to a music-hall on a Saturday for fear I should laugh in the kirk on the Sabbath."

A well-known, but not too tactful actress was asked to sing at a prison concert, and in the course of her song trilled, "Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage." At this point there came a feeling voice from the audience, "But, lydy, 'ow they do help."

The matinée idol was a little too fond of boasting of his conquests. "Women," he said once in the club, "are an open book to me. I understand them inside out." "Well," said another old actor, "can you tell me what women car-drivers mean when they hold out their hand?"

ACTOR ON THE STAGE: "I am so timid, so nervous, I can never face a judge."

VOICE FROM THE GALLERY: "Neither can I. When I was at the Old Bailey . . ." But the rest was drowned in the trampling of the feet of the chuckers-out.

Toole had at all times a great objection to anything approaching swank. Going down a street once, he noticed an individual with a very marked superior and supercilious air. "Excuse me, sir," said the actor, "I'm very sorry to trouble you, but can you tell me the rent of No. 7?" at the same time pointing to a house with a "To let" board. "What on earth do you mean? How the devil should I know?" asked the superior one. "I beg your pardon," said Toole with a disarming smile, "but I fancied from your manner and appearance that you owned the whole street. Good morning."

Dan Leno, following a breakdown, was for some time an inmate of Colney Hatch. He was visited there by a friend, who asked if the clock in the visitors' room was right. "Yes," replied Dan, and then, sidling up, he said in a confidential whisper, "and it's the only d—— thing in this place that is right."

Arthur Roberts was no believer in "early to bed and early to rise." One night he arrived home at the unusually early hour (for him) of 3 a.m., but on turning into bed found that he could not sleep. At 6 a.m. he got up, dressed, and went out. As he stood at the hall door, a passing policeman, who knew him, greeted him with "Good night, Mr. Roberts."

The kind-hearted actor thought he would bring a little joy into the hard life of the maid-of-all-work at his digs. "Here are two seats for the theatre on Wednesday night," he said. "Oh, sir," said the blushing recipient. "Can't you get off any other night?"

"I find I can't use these tickets to-night," said the purchaser. "Can you change them for two K stalls for to-morrow night?" "We haven't got the same seats then," answered the box-office clerk, "but if you like you can go to L."

In his early 'days Harry Lauder was singing at a concert, and, when he had finished, one of his audience was overheard to say, "I shouldn't wonder if we hear of him getting five pounds a week yet!"

The curtain was just about to be rung up when the stage manager discovered one of the actors in the wings in a state of alcoholic hesitation and without either make-up or costume. "Here, hurry up," he said, "you've only five minutes." "It's no use, old feller," said the delinquent, "really can't 'pear to-night. I never could stand those darned revolving stages."

A well-known actor, making a provincial tour, had been the recipient of several kindnesses from his landlady and her husband, and, anxious to make some return, asked them if they would like to see him act. The reply being in the affirmative, he handed over five shillings and told them to go to the theatre that evening. Next day he enquired how they had enjoyed their evening. "Oh, very much, sir," was the reply; "but we hope you won't mind, seeing as 'ow we had a fish supper and went to the pictures instead."

Once, Mrs. Langtry, playing in *Camilla*, suddenly noticed that the white camellia which she had to present to her lover, and which should have been lying on the table, was

missing. Stepping to the wings, she asked for anything that would take the place of the flower, and something was accordingly handed to her. Returning to the front of the stage, she thus addressed her lover. "Take this flower, Armand. It is rare, pale, senseless, cold, but sensitive as purity itself. Cherish it, and its beauty will excel the loveliest flower that grows, but wound it with a single touch and you shall never recall its bloom or wipe away the stain." So saying, she handed him—half a stick of celery, part of the lunch of one of the theatrical stage hands.

A singular but pathetic coincidence marked the term of office as Sheriff of the City of London of Sir Augustus Harris. On the first occasion when, in his official capacity, he accompanied the Judge on the Bench, the first prisoner to be put up was his own pantaloon of the previous Christmas, for many years one of the Drury Lane harlequinade, who was charged with bigamy.

An eminent actor, well known for his bad writing, sent a letter to the stage manager suggesting certain alterations. The latter, unable



to read it, took it in despair to the conductor of the orchestra. "Can you make this out?" he asked. The conductor studied it for a moment or two. "I tell you what," he suggested at length, "I'll try it over on the piano if you like."

When taking the part of Henry VIII, Mr. Arthur Bouchier grew a beard. In this disguise he was not recognised by the porter at his club, who thereupon asked his name. "Henry the Eighth," replied the actor. Running his eye down the H's in the members' book, the porter turned to him, and, with a condemnatory look, said, "No longer a member, sir."

"Fame, after all," complained the actor, "is but a poor thing. You would hardly believe it, but the other night I was refused admittance to the Coronet Theatre until I told them who I was." "And who did you tell them you were?" enquired his candid friend.

On one occasion Augustus Harris and two other actors went into an East End music-hall and during the performance were laughing at

a joke, but an artiste on the stage thought they were laughing at her. Later she came down among the audience to sell chocolates and cigarettes—part of her nightly duty—and, coming up to the three, she went for them. “It’s just like three pros,” she said, “who come in on the nod to come and guy me. I know you (turning to the first one), and (to the second) no one could mistake you, while (turning to Harris) I’m certain you’re an actor.” At this Gus jumped up, and seizing the lady by both hands said impressively, “Thank you, madam, for those few kind words. I have been called a great many things in my life, but it’s the first time I’ve been called an actor.”

It was a very dull play. “This is dreadful,” said one of those present; “I wonder the audience don’t hiss.” “They can’t do that,” replied the other; “it’s impossible to hiss and yawn at the same time.”

“Do you know what it is to go before a vast audience?” “Well,” said the would-be actor sadly, “I acted before an audience once, and most of it went before I did.”

A comedian was being tried for an engagement. "That will do," said the manager; "I can't have profanity in my theatre." "But I don't use any profanity," expostulated the comic one. "No," was the reply, "but the audience would."

"Maisie isn't making much of her singing part," said one chorus girl to another. "No," said the other, "she only had an encore once in her life, and that was when she was born—a twin."

Some actors are so susceptible that they cannot endure the boiling of a kettle. They can't stand the hissing sound.

Neglect to give him what the "star" considers his due meed of praise has, at least on one occasion, led to a scene. Kean, prince of actors, once appeared in a provincial town as Othello, the part of Iago being taken by a local actor known and popular in the vicinity. Unfortunately, when the play came off, losing their sense of justice in their local patriotism, the audience gave an enthusiastic reception to the local favourite and took little or no notice of the famous London player. Stung to fury,

Kean quitted the stage at the end of the performance, leaving Iago to receive the plaudits of the audience. After these had been given for some minutes there came a very much modified call for Kean, and, at the urgent request of the manager, he once more took the stage. Marching to the centre of the footlights, he glared at the audience, waved his hand for silence, and then, in his most scornful tones, snarled, "You b—— fools, you don't know good acting from bad."

An actor who, by means of gagging, administered a well-earned rebuke was George Graves. During the run of *The Belle of Brittany* at the Queen's Theatre, one of his songs was spoiled by a noisy party entering the first row of the stalls with a deal of unnecessary noise. Stopping his song, Graves looked sternly at the party, and then, turning to the house, said, "The Tooting Express has just arrived."

Once, in an audition at the Gaiety Theatre, an aspirant to the male chorus was asked to sing something, and chose the "Last Watch," but he only got as far as the line "This is the last last time we meet," when he was interrupted

by George Edwardes with, "Quite so, that is correct; next one, please."

The orchestra at a provincial theatre was certainly not of the first rank. Just as it finished one piece a gentleman in the stalls strolled up and enquired from the conductor if they played things by request. "Certainly," was the reply. "Good," said the enquirer. "Then would you kindly request your orchestra to play dominoes."

Self-appreciation appears to be a thing that comes early in life in the theatrical world. A small boy, the son of an actor, showed some promise as a performer on the piano, and was accordingly taken to a world-famed pianist for an opinion on his powers. Unfortunately, the opinion was not favourable, and a friend of the family ventured to utter a few consoling words. "Oh, I didn't mind," said the eight-year-old prodigy; "it was only professional jealousy."

The struggle to top the bill or to win applause has resulted in a crop of stories, and George Grossmith tells of a one-time actor who, whenever he heard a clap of thunder, always walked to the window and bowed.

A young actress who had been brought out of obscurity by Tree, before very long began to insist on being billed in larger type and ultimately requested that she should be given the "and." "I want," she said, "to be announced thus, 'Sir Herbert Tree and Miss X.'" "Yes, my dear child," retorted Tree, "but why 'and'?" Why not 'but'?"


A very clever but somewhat illiterate Cockney comedian was fixing up an engagement with Sir Herbert. "But look here, Guv'nor," said he, "I shall expect you to bill the 'and' before my nyme." "Alas! my dear friend," replied Tree. "How can I do so? You know it is 'ard to give the 'and where the 'Art can never be."

An actor whose opinion of his own powers was considerable was giving a company of brother actors a recital of the methods by which he attained success. "From the moment I make my first appearance on the stage," he said, "I always forget everything but my part. I leave my own personality behind me; I am Hamlet, Romeo, Othello, as the case may be; the theatre disappears; the audience vanishes;

I am——” At this moment one of the listeners broke in, “Yes I have noticed that.” “You have noticed what?” “That your audience vanishes,” came the reply.

The travelling revue company were not doing too well. “I can’t understand it,” said the manager; “no stone has been left unturned to make the show a success.” “No,” said the candid critic, “and so far as I can see no turn has been left unstoned.”

The celebrated actor, Colman, was well known for his long words and grandiose sentences. To an open-mouthed super he once said, “My dear sir, will you endeavour to demonstrate to the denizens of the auditorium that you are playing a character unlike anything of the present day. And when you ascend the stage be good enough to emit a greasy laugh of truculent defiance.”



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